

# Implications of Value Clarification Theory for Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities

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**Abstract:** *Value Clarification Theory, an influential theory in moral education in the United States, surpasses traditional moral education approaches. It establishes a framework for students to conduct self-analysis and evaluation, leading to the realization of their own values through critical thinking. This theory aligns closely with ideological and political education in terms of environment and goals. Hence, the application of this theory in ideological and political education is not only feasible but also effective. A thorough understanding of the key aspects of Value Clarification Theory can offer valuable guidance in ideological and political education. This includes emphasizing life experiences, identifying students' personal values, clarifying their subjective status, stimulating subjective consciousness, addressing intrinsic moral conflicts, and enhancing students' ability to make moral judgments and choices.*

**Keywords:** *value clarification, ideological and political education, colleges and universities*

## 1. Introduction

Values clarification theory first appeared as a classroom teaching method, advocated by New York University professor Lass and others, and gradually became an important trend in school moral education practice in the 1960s, marking its birth as an independent theoretical school. Value clarification theory is a real resource for implementing plans to make moral education more effective. Both teachers and students agree that the use of values clarification techniques contributes to making the learning environment more enjoyable and motivating.[1] Ideological and political education in colleges and universities, as an important link to cultivate morality and cultivate people, aims at cultivating new people who take on the great responsibility of national rejuvenation. At present, ideological and political education in colleges and universities is faced with the challenge of value diversity and ideological diversity. The traditional ideation-infusing education can no longer meet the requirements of the new era. The value clarification theory provides a new perspective and method for ideological and political education in colleges and universities, which helps to improve the effectiveness and pertinence of education and cultivate more new people with a sense of social responsibility and historical mission. The study of values clarification theory aims to critically incorporate some successful experiences to adapt to the complex and changing choices of social values brought about by social transformation, and to provide some useful inspiration for ideological and political education in colleges and universities.

## 2. Key Ideas of the Value Clarification Theory

The crisis of value in the context of social unrest, the profound reflection of democratic consciousness in school education and the conflict and confusion of students' values in the context of multi-culture prompted American moral scholars in the 1960s to think about the development path and direction of moral education. The theory of value clarification articulated by Louis Rath, Merrill Harming and Sydney Simon in their book *Values and Teaching* was the last choice of American society in its search for a path of moral education.

The connotation of value is key and central to the theory of value clarification. "Value represents something important in human life,"[2] and it comes closest to definitions that emphasize the evaluative process rather than any recognizable, agreed-upon meaning of the term. That is, value itself is understood in the process of value acquisition. Rath states, "Our theory of value and the pedagogical

strategies that derive from it hold that people can form values through the judicious process of choosing, valuing, and acting on them ..... Based on the support of the literature, we like to call this stuff value.”[3] “Values are the product of individual experience ..... Values are a personal thing ..... are personal.” Values are “particularly well suited to clarifying responses to such things as expressions of students’ feelings, beliefs, convictions, worries, attitudes, ambitions, purposes, interests, problems, and activities.”

Clarification of values has the following meanings: first, concern for life. It focuses on the way of life and the state of being of human beings, and emphasizes solving the difficulties and perplexities encountered by adolescents in their lives. Second, acceptance of reality. Emphasize that students should not only accept the individual’s choice after clarification, but also accept the social collective and others, including the society’s values, moral concepts, other’s views, positions, interests, feelings and so on. However, such acceptance does not mean approval or agreement, but means helping others in the process of accepting others, and getting along with others sincerely and happily. Third, to promote thinking. It requires further thinking and reflection on value issues based on acceptance of individual or other values, and encourages students to engage in comprehensive reflection. Fourth, to develop behavioral skills. Students are required not only to learn to accept, but also to reflect deeply after acceptance, and need to sublimate the thoughts after reflection into a set of value guidelines, integrate them into individual actions, and adhere to their value guidelines for a long period of time in their future actions.[4]

### **3. Feasibility Analysis of Value Clarification Theory Applied to Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities**

#### ***3.1. Similarities in the context of action***

Firstly, considering the external social context, the current alignment of ideological and political education in our nation with the theory of values clarification proves to be highly versatile. The social milieu exerts a substantial influence on students’ ideological and political education, encompassing political, economic, and cultural dimensions, which can shape students’ perspectives on the world, outlook on life, and value systems. The theory of values clarification underscores the proactive engagement and participation of individuals in the values clarification process, urging students to make independent choices and decisions in constructing their values, thus resonating with the “people-oriented” ethos advocated in university ideological and political education. Secondly, when viewed from the internal perspective of individualized educational targets, this adaptability becomes even more pronounced. University ideological and political education stresses the importance of honoring students’ subjective stances, with a focus on nurturing students’ capacity for critical thinking and self-directed decision-making. By applying the theory of values clarification, students can continuously contemplate and refine their values through practical experience, thereby enhancing their alignment with the evolving societal demands. Furthermore, the theory of values clarification has a broad application scope, especially demonstrating significant impact in the realm of moral education. It is imperative to integrate efforts in moral education into ideological and political education at universities to assist students in constructing a proper worldview, perspective on life, and principles. Implementing values clarification theory in ideological and political education at universities not only boosts students’ individuality but also effectively steers them in defining values and reaching decisions, which greatly benefits ideological and political education at universities. By employing specific approaches and tactics, values clarification theory aids students in diminishing value uncertainties, fostering the establishment of a coherent value system, and concurrently enhancing students’ cognitive and comprehension abilities. As a result, the utilization of values clarification theory in ideological and political education at universities is highly feasible and offers substantial instructional value.

#### ***3.2. Coherence in achieving objectives***

The theory of value clarification and the current objective of ideological and political education in China are both directed towards addressing the issue of confusion regarding values among educational subjects (college students). [5]They aim to assist these subjects in identifying their personalized values, comprehending their life paths, and determining the most suitable approach for their individual growth. China’s ideological and political education has various aspects of the value clarification theory from which it can learn. One crucial aspect pertains to the theory of “cherishing.” Within the value clarification theory, educators are not only required to nurture students’ capacities for independent

decision-making and self-assessment but also to motivate students to value and stand by their own decisions. This particular aspect is essential for China's ideological and political education to navigate a heterogeneous values landscape. Furthermore, regarding goal achievement, both ideological and political education and the value clarification theory place significant emphasis on practical application, stressing the fusion of knowledge and practice. Thus, China's current ideological and political education should actively embrace the repetitive action theory from the value clarification theory, encouraging students to bolster their faith in their decisions through consistent practice, thereby ensuring the transformation of moral principles into steadfast moral virtues through continual application. The utilization of values clarification theory can enhance the humanistic aspect of modern ideological and political education by emphasizing students' pivotal role. This aids students in comprehending their own values and developmental path. By guiding students in value selection and decision-making, fostering moral awareness and values, and emphasizing individual initiative and participation in the values clarification process. However, some scholars question the theory's lack of systematic and scientific nature, which may not effectively convey core values and could confuse students' values. Therefore, when employing values clarification theory, educators should consider practical scenarios, avoiding reliance solely on theory and overlooking students' values guidance. While the theory holds significant reference value and feasibility in university ideological and political education, it is crucial to account for practical situations, prevent theoretical deviations, and ensure maximum educational effectiveness.

#### **4. Value Clarification Theory's Implications for Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities**

##### ***4.1. Finding students' personal values by centering on their lives***

Value Clarification Theory emphasizes the positive significance of the element of focusing on life in order to enhance the accessibility of ideological and political theory courses. Value Clarification Theory believes that people must value and choose for themselves, and integrate the various choices into their own way of life. Values derive from the changes in life itself, which leads directly to Lockwood's words: "The issues dealt with by the theory of value clarification are primarily those related to making decisions about one's own preferences. The questions posed are designed to lead students to think about what kind of lifestyle to choose, what kind of career to pursue, how to use their leisure time, what kind of person they want to be, what kind of competent person they admire, and how to act in different situations." [6] Specifically, ideological and political education should be tailored to practical concerns linked to students' learning, social interactions, and everyday experiences. This approach must elevate the connection in teaching, embody theoretical appeal, ignite student curiosity, promote logical thinking, and nurture value discernment and judgments. For example, educators are encouraged to guide students in clarifying their values progressively by presenting real-life scenarios that are relevant to their lives for in-depth value analysis and selection within authentic contexts. Furthermore, the value clarification theory underscores selecting educational materials based on students' specific ideological contexts shaped by their lived experiences. Recognizing students' uncertainties or ideological conflicts, establishing links between new educational content and students' current ideological standings, emphasizing issue awareness, and methodically steering students towards elevating their ideological standings through addressing their value dilemmas are imperative. This strategy not only aids students in comprehending and embracing ideological and political education content better but also fosters the development of accurate ideological and ethical frameworks.

To sum up, the value clarification theory, by centering on students' daily experiences and authentic challenges, supports them in engaging in practical value analysis and selection, thereby amplifying the efficacy of ideological and political education and molding students into citizens with constructive societal values and a strong sense of duty.

##### ***4.2. Clarify students' subject position and stimulate students' subject consciousness***

The theory of values clarification theory places significant emphasis on the subjectivity of students, highlighting the influence of personal experiences and intrinsic factors in shaping values. It views students as autonomous individuals capable of independent thinking and making informed value judgments. This theory advocates for educators to support students in developing well-defined values through analytical and evaluative methods. Strategies include providing clarification to individual students, using value scales with the entire class, and fostering a positive and relaxed classroom environment. Rather than imposing absolute values, educators are encouraged to teach students how to determine their own values. Current education should focus on empowering students to make

autonomous value choices, moving away from indoctrination towards supporting students in recognizing their independent value decisions, with educators playing a supportive role in understanding their unique values. Education regarding ideological and political aspects should fully honor students' subjectivity, shifting the focus from merely transmitting knowledge and concepts to emphasizing the development of value judgment and decision-making skills. Moreover, it is crucial for students to consistently uphold their decisions in practical situations, forming values that can genuinely steer and regulate conduct through repeated practice. The theory of value clarification not only addresses "how values are acquired" but also delves into "what values are acquired." This educational framework prioritizes students' independence and subjectivity, aiming to nurture their capacity for autonomous thinking and accurate value assessments, thereby constructing their own values in a diverse and values-conflicted society. This method enables students to continually validate and refine their values through practice, gradually honing stable moral judgment and value selection abilities.

To sum up, the enlightenment of value clarification theory to ideological and political education in colleges and universities lies in clarifying students' subject status and stimulating students' subject consciousness. Through the implementation of this concept, we can better cultivate students' independent thinking and judgment ability, enhance their self-cognition and independent choice ability, stimulate their interest in learning and motivation, so as to lay a solid foundation for their all-round development.

#### ***4.3. Focusing on the stimulation of students' inner moral conflicts, improving students' moral judgment and choice ability***

Moral conflicts are scenarios commonly encountered by individuals when faced with dilemma or multiple dilemma choices. Every moral decision arises and concludes within a moral conflict. Absent moral conflicts, there would be no moral decisions. Moral decisions necessitate moral agents to make value-driven choices that serve their own interests amidst conflicting moral principles or norms, conflicting interests, and to attain their moral goals by addressing this conflict. Various moral perspectives converge in students' internal worlds due to the diversity of information, leading to intense clashes among different moral standpoints. Students' selection among these moral viewpoints is founded on moral conflicts. Therefore, educators engaged in ideological and political education must employ relevant conflict resolution techniques, place emphasis on provoking students' internal moral conflicts, guide them in making judgments and choices within conflicts, and assist them in resolving conflicts arising from judgment and choice. As the theory of values clarification states, the process of acquiring values is more important than determining what values are acquired. The aim of moral education is not to instill specific values in students, but rather to help them understand how to obtain value. Therefore, cultivating students' abilities in value analysis, moral judgment, and decision-making should be the focus of values education. Actively guiding students in making moral judgments, analyzing the consequences of different moral choices, and assisting students in continually evaluating and improving their moral decisions will ultimately lead to the development of individual correct and sound moral principles. To achieve this goal, a variety of teaching methods can be employed. For instance, by creating moral dilemmas to evoke cognitive conflict in students, stimulating their moral interests, and guiding discussions on these issues and situations. Additionally, drawing on Kohlberg's dilemma storytelling method to craft stories containing conflicts of moral values, students can enhance their moral judgment and decision-making abilities through debate and discussion.

In conclusion, by establishing a conducive environment and fully respecting the students' autonomy, teachers can effectively guide students in making judgments and choices in moral conflicts, thereby enhancing their moral judgment and decision-making capabilities.[7]

#### ***4.4. Enhance the diversification of teacher guidance and evaluation systems, and establish an independent and equitable teacher-student relationship as well as an educational atmosphere.***

The theory of values clarification has not only paved the way for ideological and political education in universities, but has also deeply uncovered the core of values education - the advancement of students' intrinsic value systems through self-directed building and enhancement. In this journey, educators are bestowed with a grand mission. They serve as not only knowledge torchbearers, illuminating the path for students, but also as mentors of their inner selves, steering them towards comprehending the essence and importance of values amidst the intricacies of social phenomena. Hence, empowering teachers through robust professional development and guidance skills, embracing flexible and diverse teaching approaches like case studies, role-playing, and group discussions, is crucial. These methods aim to spark students' autonomy and ingenuity, enabling them to progressively clarify their values through exploration and hands-on experience. This process is pivotal in elevating the quality of ideological and political education in universities and attaining educational objectives.

When creating a diverse assessment system, it is important to consider not just the academic achievements of students, but also their overall qualities and individual growth. This involves moving away from traditional single assessment approaches and incorporating a range of assessment criteria and methods like project assessment, peer assessment, self-assessment, and more. These methods offer a comprehensive and unbiased view of students' development and advancement. Additionally, it is crucial to consider the evaluation process itself, focusing on students' performance and dedication during their learning journey. Providing them with prompt feedback and support, helping them recognize their strengths and areas for improvement, assists in forming tailored learning strategies and developmental objectives. Building autonomous and equal teacher-student relationships and an educational atmosphere is essential to fulfilling the clarifying values in education. In this atmosphere, teachers should become friends and partners with students, exploring, learning, and growing together. Teachers should encourage students to express their opinions and thoughts, respect their differences and diversity, and create an open, inclusive, and free learning environment for them. At the same time, teachers should pay attention to their own words and actions, set a good example for students, guide them to form correct values and morals. In this educational environment, students will become more confident, autonomous, and actively engaged in learning, continuously improving their comprehensive quality and innovative ability.

In conclusion, the theory of clarifying values provides rich theoretical resources and practical guidance for ideological and political education in universities. By strengthening teacher guidance, building a diverse evaluation system, and implementing measures to create autonomous and equal teacher-student relationships and an educational atmosphere, we can more effectively cultivate students' correct values and comprehensive qualities, laying a solid foundation for their holistic development. At the same time, this will also promote continuous innovation and development in ideological and political education in universities, contributing greater strength to the cultivation of socialist constructors and successors who are well-rounded in morality, intelligence, physicality, aesthetics, and labor.

## 5. Conclusions

Value clarification theory has a very high reference value for the ideological and political education in China's colleges and universities under the current situation of multiple values, and it is worthwhile for more Civic Educators to study it in depth and put it into practice. Value clarification theory can better highlight the humanistic color of ideological and political education and respect the personalized value and subject position of college students. Value clarification theory can also better promote the improvement and progress of ideological and political education in the aspect of unity of knowledge and action, better promote the formation of college students' consciousness of moral practice and self-examination through repeated practice, and ensure the independence and autonomy of college students' choices by guiding college students to think over and over again in order to form their personalized value concepts.

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