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Constructing an Integrated "One Core, Five Dimensions" Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education System for Master of Education Programs: Reality Examination, Causal Attribution, and Practical Approaches

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Abstract:
Comprehensively advancing curriculum-based ideological and political education (CIPE) constitutes a strategic initiative for fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, with its deeper proposition lying in achieving a paradigm shift from "element implantation" to "system reconstruction." Grounded in the theoretical perspective of "Grand Ideological and Political Education" (Da Sizheng), this study takes the Master of Education (Ed.M.) program at a local normal university as an observational case, and employs analytical frameworks including curriculum and instruction principles, hidden curriculum theory, and synergy theory to examine the practical dilemmas of CIPE construction. The study identifies three structural imbalances at the practical level: a configurational imbalance between theoretical coursework and practicum components, a subjective imbalance between curriculum instruction and mentor supervision, and a functional imbalance between institutional supply and construction demands. The underlying causes are rooted in three structural ruptures: hierarchical fragmentation within the institutional system, collaborative disconnection among educational stakeholders, and transmission failure along the value chain. On this basis, the study proposes an integrated "One Core, Five Dimensions" CIPE system, which takes "soul-casting and virtue-nurturing" as its axiological core, employs theoretical coursework and the "Three Practicum Components" (educational observation, educational internship, and educational inquiry) as its dual foundations, and utilizes the teaching process, faculty team, and instructional evaluation as its three supporting pillars, thereby providing theoretical reference points and practical pathways for the systematization and professionalization of CIPE construction in Ed.M. programs.

Keywords:
Grand Ideological and Political Education; Master of Education; curriculum-based ideological and political education; integrated system; system construction

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In May 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the Guidelines for Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education Construction in Higher Education Institutions [1], establishing CIPE as a strategic initiative for fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. In July 2022, the Ministry of Education and nine other departments jointly issued the Work Plan for Comprehensively Advancing the Construction of "Grand Ideological and Political Courses" [2], explicitly mandating the "promotion of soul-casting and virtue-nurturing through the Party's innovative theories," marking a comprehensive expansion of ideological and political education from the primary classroom channel to a multi-domain coordinated "Grand Ideological and Political Education" framework. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China further emphasized "improving the ideological and political work system" [3], elevating systematic construction to the level of national strategy. From the comprehensive rollout of CIPE to the systematic advancement of "Grand Ideological and Political Courses," the policy trajectory clearly delineates a reform logic and paradigm shift moving from element implantation toward system reconstruction. The systemic thinking and collaborative requirements embedded in the "Grand Ideological and Political Education" perspective provide a new epistemological framework for addressing the deeper problems of ideological and political education in graduate programs.

Professional degree education for the Master of Education (Ed.M.) carries the distinctive mission of cultivating high-quality teachers for basic education and, moreover, exerts profound intergenerational influence on primary and secondary school students through its graduates' instructional practices. Full-time Ed.M. programs must achieve deep integration across the two dimensions of disciplinary understanding and professional practice. This dual attribute—that "educators must themselves first be educated"—determines that CIPE in Ed.M. programs must attain higher standards of systematization and professionalization [4]. However, current CIPE construction in Ed.M. programs has revealed conspicuous systemic dilemmas under the "Grand Ideological and Political Education" perspective: theoretical coursework and practicum components lack coordination, gaps in education persist between curriculum instruction and mentor supervision, and discrepancies exist between institutional supply and departmental construction demands. The essence of these problems lies in the structural obstacles encountered during the transformation of CIPE from "comprehensive coverage" to "system construction." Accordingly, this study, grounded in the "Grand Ideological and Political Education" perspective and based on an analysis of the manifestations and causal attributions of the fragmentation dilemma in Ed.M. CIPE, proposes and constructs an integrated "One Core, Five Dimensions" CIPE system, with the aim of providing theoretical reference points and practical pathways for resolving the aforementioned dilemmas.

1. Reality Examination: Three Structural Imbalances in Ed.M. Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education Construction

Accurately grasping the actual state of CIPE construction in Ed.M. programs constitutes the fundamental prerequisite for constructing a scientifically sound and effective CIPE system. The systemic, collaborative, and coherent requirements implied by the "Grand Ideological and Political Education" perspective precisely constitute the theoretical reference for examining this practical condition. Using the Ed.M. program at a local normal university in Hebei Province as an observational case, and employing analytical frameworks derived

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from Tyler's curriculum development rationale, hidden curriculum theory, and synergy theory, this study conducted a systematic examination of the institutional documents, curriculum plans, and operational mechanisms of CIPE construction at the university. The findings reveal that holistic coordination of educational elements is difficult to achieve, and systematic integration and organic coherence between the curriculum system and training components are lacking, presenting a fragmented, disconnected, and mutually detached state in which synergistic educational effects cannot be generated. The external manifestations of these deeper structural contradictions are concentrated in three structural imbalances.

1.1 Structural Fissures in the Curriculum Ecology: Configurational Imbalance between Theoretical Coursework and Practicum Components

Ed.M. programs operate a curriculum system that accords equal emphasis to theoretical coursework and practicum components, with the practicum teaching components—including educational observation, educational internship, and educational inquiry (collectively termed the "Three Practicum Components"), the Basic Education Forum, teacher professional skills training and competitions, and related activities—typically accounting for more than one-third of the total credit hours. According to Tyler's curriculum development rationale, curriculum objectives, content, organization, and evaluation should maintain internal consistency, and ideological-political elements should be systematically embedded across all course types. However, in terms of resource allocation for CIPE, there exists a conspicuous "asymmetric distribution" of ideological-political element integration between theoretical coursework and practicum components.

Theoretical coursework, by virtue of its relatively fixed instructional space, relatively standardized instructional organization, and relatively complete instructional documentation, receives comparatively greater attention regarding the educational value of CIPE. Instructors consciously embed ideological-political elements within established teaching frameworks, and the institution is able to monitor and evaluate the integration of ideological-political elements in theoretical courses through routine mechanisms such as syllabus review and teaching plan inspection. Practicum components, by contrast, present considerable challenges in anchoring ideological-political objectives and content, owing to the extensive spatial extension of the teaching environment—spanning multiple domains including on-campus micro-teaching laboratories, off-campus practicum bases, and basic education schools—as well as the temporal dispersion of the components, with observation, internship, and inquiry distributed across different semesters and time periods. In activities such as observational learning at practicum sites, hands-on experience in classroom management, and the practical execution of instructional design, there is a lack of clear normative guidance regarding how ideological-political elements should be integrated, who bears responsibility for such integration, and how it should be evaluated. This has produced a "structural blind spot" in CIPE construction: the value cognition constructed during the theoretical learning phase fails to be reinforced, validated, and examined during the critical practicum experience phase. Consequently, the educational effectiveness of CIPE is confined within the classroom and cannot extend into the practicum domain.

1.2 Functional Idling of Educational Stakeholders: Collaborative Imbalance between Curriculum Instruction and Mentor Supervision

Ed.M. programs operate a multi-stakeholder collaborative education mechanism involving "course instruc-

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tors + dual mentors," in which course instructors are responsible for curriculum delivery, on-campus mentors are responsible for academic guidance and ideological mentorship, and off-campus mentors are responsible for practicum supervision and professional development guidance. From the perspective of institutional design in its normative state, these three parties should form synergistic effects around educational objectives, organically integrating CIPE into their respective instructional and supervisory activities. According to synergy theory, the components and elements within a system, through synergistic interaction, can generate system-level holistic value at the macro level that exceeds the sum of its independent parts—that is, synergy effects [5]. CIPE fundamentally requires that ideological-political courses and various disciplinary courses "proceed in the same direction and generate synergistic effects," with such synergy encompassing both value consistency at the objective level and functional complementarity at the implementation level.

However, in actual operation, there exists conspicuous collaborative deficiency and ambiguity of role boundaries among the three parties. The institutional design of "all-member education" degenerates in practice into a state of "each operating independently": course instructors tend to construe their CIPE responsibilities as confined to their own teaching tasks, consciously treating ideological-political integration as an in-class assignment; on-campus mentors focus predominantly on students' academic development, narrowing ideological-political guidance to occasional mentor-student conversations; and off-campus mentors concentrate on students' practical competency development, excluding ideological-political education from their perceived scope of practicum supervision responsibilities. There is a lack of effective communication and coordination mechanisms among the three parties—no institutionalized system exists for regularly reporting students' ideological-political status between course instructors and mentors, and no linkage mechanism exists for collaborative guidance between on-campus and off-campus mentors. In the process of extending the CIPE education chain from the classroom to the mentor supervision phase, transmission failure occurs due to collaborative ruptures among stakeholders.

1.3 Institutional Supply Lag in the Institutional Environment: Functional Imbalance between Institutional Supply and Construction Demands

CIPE construction constitutes a systematic project requiring sustained institutional supply. The assessment and incentive mechanism serves as the driving force for its continuous development, while resource platform construction provides the supporting guarantee for its sustained operation. From the demand side, CIPE construction in Ed.M. programs involves multiple components—theoretical coursework, practicum components, mentor supervision, and instructional evaluation—urgently requiring systematic institutional arrangements to regulate stakeholder behavior, coordinate stakeholder actions, and motivate stakeholder engagement. However, from the supply side, the assessment and incentive mechanism has long remained in a state of absence: after instructors invest additional time and effort in mining ideological-political elements, optimizing instructional design, and reflecting on educational effectiveness, they receive no institutional recognition or reward; CIPE teaching achievements are not incorporated into substantive consideration for professional title evaluation or position appointment; and instructors' enthusiasm for participation lacks sustained institutional incentives. Simultaneously, the construction of CIPE resource platforms has lagged severely—there is neither a systematic repository of CIPE teaching cases and resource-sharing platforms within the institution, nor standardized channels for exchange and mutual learning with other institutions.

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The crux of the functional imbalance between institutional supply and construction demands lies not in the presence or absence of any particular institution but rather in the lack of organic articulation among the various elements within the institutional system. Assessment and incentive mechanisms, resource allocation, capacity building, and quality monitoring each operate independently, failing to form a mutually reinforcing institutional chain. CIPE construction has consequently remained perpetually oscillating between "campaign-style promotion" and "routinized operation"—intensively advanced when policy mandates exist, and reverting to routine operations when explicit directives are absent. The functional lag in institutional supply prevents CIPE from transforming from the conscientious behavior of individual instructors into systematic organizational action.

2. Causal Attribution: Three Structural Ruptures in Ed.M. Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education Construction

The three imbalances described above do not exist as isolated phenomena but rather constitute external manifestations of deeper structural contradictions. Through scholarly examination beneath the surface phenomena, it becomes evident that the three imbalances are rooted in three structural ruptures within the CIPE system construction process.

2.1 Hierarchical Fragmentation within the Institutional System: Transmission Blockage in the Governance Chain

The institutional design for CIPE in Ed.M. programs involves multiple governance levels: the National Education Professional Degree Graduate Education Steering Committee is responsible for top-level policy formulation, the university's graduate school is responsible for macro-level institutional arrangements, the college is responsible for designing specific implementation plans, and discipline groups and program coordinators are responsible for course-level detailed implementation. An ideal institutional system should achieve progressive transformation and effective articulation from the macro level to the micro level, enabling policy requirements to be ultimately converted into operational, inspectable, and evaluable teaching behaviors. This requires that the institutional system itself possess "inter-level transformability"—each level must be capable of decomposing higher-level requirements into specific executable tasks at its own level, while providing a clear action framework for the next level.

However, in actual operation, there exists conspicuous transmission attenuation and articulation rupture among the various levels. Macro-level requirements in policy documents, such as "comprehensively advancing CIPE construction" and "constructing an all-member, whole-process, all-dimension education framework," can maintain directional consistency when transmitted to the college level, but when concretized at the curriculum and teaching levels, there is a lack of technical pathways for decomposing macro-level objectives into disciplinary training objectives, course objectives, and instructional session objectives. The boundaries of authority and responsibility among levels also remain unclear: which decisions belong to the university level, which to the college level, and which fall within the discretionary space of the discipline group level lack clear institutional definition. The essence of hierarchical fragmentation lies in the loosening of the "institutional chain": upper levels possess principles without detailed rules, while lower levels possess

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actions without direction. CIPE construction has consequently remained in a state of "dual suspension," in which the value advocacy of policy requirements and the individual pedagogical explorations of instructors lack an intermediate-level institutional transformation mechanism, preventing effective articulation between top-level design and grassroots practice. Therefore, one of the logical prerequisites for system construction is as follows: a goal decomposition and transmission mechanism must be established among governance levels, enabling macro-level policy requirements to be progressively transformed into operational teaching behavior norms.

2.2 Collaborative Disconnection among Educational Stakeholders: Structural Decoupling among Multiple Roles

"Three-Whole Education" (San Quan Yu Ren)—whole-member education, whole-process education, and whole-dimension education—constitutes a tripartite integrated new framework, new concept, and new system for ideological and political education, with its core essence lying in whole-member participation, whole-process continuity, and whole-dimension coverage [6]. Among these, "whole-member education" requires that all educational stakeholders—including course instructors, on-campus mentors, off-campus mentors, and teaching administrators—should assume educational responsibilities, forming synergistic educational effects. However, in actual operation, collaborative disconnection among multiple stakeholders has become the critical factor constraining the educational effectiveness of CIPE.

Collaborative disconnection manifests first as ambiguity of role boundaries. What are the specific responsibilities of course instructors, on-campus mentors, and off-campus mentors in CIPE? In which segments and through what means should each party perform their educational functions? These critical questions lack clear institutional definition. Ambiguous role definitions directly lead to a "responsibility dilution effect": when everyone is considered responsible, no one is in fact genuinely accountable. Second, collaborative disconnection manifests as the hollowing-out of communication mechanisms. There is a lack of institutionalized channels for communicating students' ideological-political status between course instructors and on-campus mentors, and a lack of linkage mechanisms for collaborative guidance between on-campus and off-campus mentors. The ideological-political education students receive in large-class instruction, the disciplinary learning conducted under mentor guidance, and the hands-on experience gained at practicum sites remain independent and mutually disconnected from one another.

The essence of this collaborative disconnection lies in the "structural decoupling" among multiple educational roles—each role is assigned the normative function of collaborative education in institutional design, yet the actual operational structure lacks the procedural mechanisms and institutional safeguards necessary for achieving such synergy. The interaction structure among stakeholders fails to form effective "coupling" relationships; synergistic educational effects therefore cannot be generated, and whole-process continuity of CIPE cannot be realized. Therefore, the second logical prerequisite for system construction is as follows: the responsibilities of each educational stakeholder in CIPE must be structurally configured, and institutionalized communication and coordination mechanisms must be established, transforming "whole-member education" from conceptual advocacy into an operational collaborative architecture.

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2.3 Transmission Failure along the Value Chain: The "Meaning Void" from Training Objectives to Instructional Practice

The effective implementation of CIPE in Ed.M. programs requires traversing a complete value transmission chain: "ideological-political requirements in training objectives → ideological-political design in the curriculum system → ideological-political decomposition in course objectives → ideological-political implementation in instructional sessions → ideological-political feedback in learning assessment." Each link in this chain is both a refinement and implementation of the preceding link, and simultaneously the basis and prerequisite for the subsequent link. Only when effective articulation and progressive transformation are achieved among all links can the educational value of CIPE be realized throughout the entire training process.

However, in the practical operation of CIPE in Ed.M. programs, conspicuous ruptures exist in the transmission process of this value chain. At the objective level, the macro-level articulations regarding "fostering virtue through education" and "professional ethics formation" in the training program fail to be effectively converted into specific course-level instructional objectives. At the design level, CIPE construction requirements fail to be systematically integrated into course syllabi and teaching plans. At the implementation level, ideological-political integration points in classroom instruction often constitute instructors' subjective selections rather than systematic designs based on course objectives. At the evaluation level, there is a lack of effective mechanisms for observing and providing feedback on the development of students' ideological-political literacy.

The transmission failure along the value chain creates a "meaning void" between training objectives and instructional practice in CIPE: value advocacy undergoes continuous erosion and attenuation through progressive transmission, ultimately leaving only superficial formalistic embedding in specific instructional sessions while losing substantive educational meaning. The underlying cause is that CIPE value objectives, in the process of transformation from the macro level to the micro level, lack an intermediate-level "meaning construction" mechanism. Accordingly, the third logical prerequisite for system construction is as follows: a "translation" mechanism must be established at each transformation node along the value chain, ensuring that ideological-political objectives maintain meaning continuity and operational feasibility throughout the progressive decomposition process.

3. System Construction: Practical Approaches to the Integrated "One-Core-Five-Dimension" Model

Based on the foregoing realistic review and attribution analysis, this study constructs an integrated "One-Core-Five-Dimension" model for curriculum-based ideological and political education, which features a hierarchical configuration of "one central goal, two cornerstones, and three supporting pillars". Centered on "forging souls and nurturing talents", the model takes theoretical courses and the "Three-Practice" series (educational probation, educational internship, and educational research-practice) as its two cornerstones, and relies on teaching procedures, faculty development, and teaching evaluation as its three supporting pillars. Designed following a complete closed-loop logic of curriculum construction, this system translates the systematic and collaborative philosophy of the "comprehensive ideological-political education framework" into

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operable curriculum components and teaching links, realizing logical coherence from problem diagnosis to scheme design.

3.1 One Central Goal: Value Anchoring and Goal-Oriented Governance of Forging Souls and Nurturing Talents

As the core and value kernel of the curriculum-based ideological-political education system, forging souls and nurturing talents defines its ultimate value orientation and overarching goal-setting function. Marxist theory on the all-round development of human beings provides the philosophical foundation for this fundamental objective. Education is ultimately oriented not merely toward one-dimensional knowledge transmission, but toward the free and all-round development of individuals. "Forging souls" means consolidating students' ideals and convictions through Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era; "nurturing talents" refers to cultivating socialist builders and successors with all-round moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor-related development.

Forging souls and nurturing talents carries special significance in the training of Master of Education (MEd) students. As future transmitters of values, MEd candidates are not only knowledge learners, but also future practitioners of educational ethics. Only when they themselves hold firm ideals and convictions and noble moral sentiments can they achieve moral integrity in personal conduct, scholarly pursuit, and instructional practice in their future teaching careers. By establishing this central goal, the curriculum-based ideological-political education system transcends the simplistic additive logic of "curriculum plus ideological-political education". It anchors value guidance throughout the whole talent-training process, such that all teaching objectives, curriculum contents, pedagogical approaches, and evaluation designs revolve around the core value of forging souls and nurturing talents, yielding organic integration of curriculum elements under unified goal governance.

3.2 Two Cornerstones: Collaborative Architecture of Theoretical Courses and the "Three-Training" Practical Courses

First, establish an ideological-political integration mechanism for theoretical courses. Theoretical courses for Master of Education (MEd) students include compulsory public courses, elective public courses, compulsory major-specific courses, and elective major-specific courses. Theoretical courses focus on the systematic construction of ideological-political cognition. According to Tyler's principles of curriculum development, the integration of ideological-political elements into theoretical courses should be systematically advanced at three levels. At the curriculum-objective level, the central goal of "forging souls and nurturing talents" is decomposed into operable hierarchical curriculum objectives. At the syllabus level, ideological-political elements are organically embedded into the design of chapter contents to achieve deep coupling rather than superficial superposition. At the classroom-teaching level, typical cases are adopted to guide students to deepen their understanding of educational ethics and teachers' professional ethics.

Second, form an ideological-political penetration pathway for the "Three-Training" practical courses. Practical courses constitute a core component of MEd training, covering educational probation, educational internship, and educational research-practice (the "Three-Training" components), alongside basic-education

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lecture forums and professional-skill training and competitions for teachers. The "Three-Training" practical courses emphasize the internalization of ideological-political emotions and the formation of ideological-political behavioral habits. To implement ideological-political penetration, appropriate content and approaches should be selected for each segment, so as to realize the spiral improvement of students' ideological-political literacy across three progressive stages. In educational probation, when students are first exposed to authentic educational settings, emphasis is placed on helping them perceive the sacredness and sense of responsibility of the teaching profession and comprehend the professional connotation of "Learn to be a teacher; behave to be a role model". In educational internship, as students are deeply engaged in the whole process of teaching and schooling, they are guided to abide by ethical norms in pedagogical practice. Activities such as reflective journals on teacher ethics and debates over educational ethics facilitate the transformation from ideological-political awareness to behavioral habits. In educational research-practice, students reflect and improve upon practical experiences. They are encouraged to examine educational phenomena from perspectives such as educational equity, enabling the sublimation of perceptual experience into rational cognition. The synergy between theoretical courses and the "Three-Training" practical courses realizes the organic unity of knowledge transmission and value guidance, cognitive advancement and affective experience, as well as theoretical learning and embodied practice.

3.3 Three Supporting Pillars: Safeguard Mechanisms of Teaching Procedures, Faculty Team, and Teaching Evaluation

First, full-segment permeation within teaching procedures. Curriculum-based ideological-political education is not an "add-on" to isolated teaching segments, but a "permeation" running through the entire teaching process. It should be reflected in every instructional link: systematic excavation of ideological-political elements before class, organic integration and value guidance during lectures, and consolidation and reinforcement via after-class assignments and tutoring. In MEd training, the teaching process itself serves as a vital field for fostering normal-university professionalism. Teachers' approaches to instruction, their attitudes toward students, and how they handle value-laden conflicts in teaching constitute the hidden curriculum of teaching, which often exerts a more profound influence on students than explicit ideological-political content. Essentially, curriculum-based ideological-political education embeds value guidance into professional teaching in implicit ways, achieving the intrinsic unity of knowledge delivery and value shaping.

Second, a collaborative education framework for the faculty team. Teachers occupy a leading position in education. A faculty team structured under the "course instructor plus dual-mentor" model facilitates effective implementation of curriculum-based ideological-political education. Course instructors integrate ideological-political priorities into theoretical and practical teaching to enhance students' moral cognition and value-judgment capacity. On-campus and off-campus dual mentors undertake not only academic and practical supervision but also routine guidance on students' ideological and moral development. Through regular communication, they monitor students' ideological trends and provide timely guidance to advance the internalization of moral sentiments. Effective coordination among system components yields the effect that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts". Such structured faculty configuration translates the notion of full-staff education into practice and brings about diversified educational agents with complementary functions.

Third, comprehensive design of teaching evaluation. Teaching evaluation offers a systematic examination

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of the extent to which curriculum-based ideological-political objectives are attained. Evaluation cannot rely merely on conventional knowledge-based assessments; multiple evaluation instruments must be adopted. In terms of evaluation content, multi-dimensional indicators should be formulated grounded in curriculum-based ideological-political goals, with ideological-political factors embedded within the indicator system. For evaluation methods, performance assessment is deployed to examine students' ideological-moral literacy through authentic outputs such as presentations, demonstrations, and practical work. Regarding evaluation timing, formative assessment is combined with summative assessment, covering students' entire learning trajectory from routine assignments and in-class performance to terminal examinations. Comprehensive evaluation design renders the effects of curriculum-based ideological-political education "observable and assessable" rather than immeasurable, furnishing feedback mechanisms for continuous system optimization.

To sum up, under the framework of comprehensive ideological-political education, the core proposition for constructing the curriculum-based ideological-political education system for MEd students lies in shifting from mechanical superposition of scattered elements toward systematic organic integration. The integrated "One-Core-Five-Dimension" model overcomes the limitation of "emphasizing conceptual advocacy while neglecting system construction" in existing curriculum-based ideological-political education research. It translates the principle of Three-Wide Education (whole-person, whole-process, all-participant education) into operable and assessable curriculum components and teaching links, completing the methodological transformation from policy concepts to talent-training schemes. It responds to the essential requirement that "educators must receive education first", and offers a feasible pathway for normal universities to advance from fragmented practices toward systematic construction. Its deeper value lies in revealing the internal logic whereby curriculum-based ideological-political education evolves from conceptual recognition toward institutional establishment.

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