



Research on the Construction of Excellent Classes for College Students in China in the New Era

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Students in China in the New Era

I. Introduction

As a basic unit for college students' education in China, class is a campus management method with Chinese characteristics, in which students grow both academically and physically. The rapid development of global economy fueled by the Internet stimulates mounting demands for comprehensive and innovative talents by the international community. Consequently, to meet the needs of the society, Chinese universities are propelling cultivation of comprehensive and innovative talents, exploring training mechanisms such as general enrollment, credit system and collegiate system. At present, college students are identifying their personal development goals according to social demands and their personal characteristics, and generating diversified demands for higher education. However, the traditional class model suffered a great failure and faced multiple problems, including poorly organized classes, team-spirit-absent students, negative guiding effect and bad style of study.

To address the existing drawbacks, based on K. Lewin's group dynamics, this paper analyzes the characteristics of four excellent classes in Chinese universities by means of literature research and multi-case study, providing reference for future construction of excellent classes.

II. Research Design

1. Theoretical basis

German social psychologist K. Lewin, who has put forward group dynamics based on his theory of psychodynamics in the 1940s, perceives that group is not formed based on physical approximation or simple similarity of the members, but on the fact that a group of interdependent people gather together [1]. According to the theory, a person's behavior (B) is the result of internal demand (P) and external environment (E), which can be expressed by $B=f(P, E)$. [2] Meanwhile, he introduced the concepts of group cohesion, pressure and standard within a group, leadership and performance, individual motivation and group goals, and group structure. [3]

2. Research method

In recent years, with the popularization of group dynamics in China, Chinese academic community has carried out multiple researches based on group dynamics in combination with Chinese social background and educational characteristics. Current research on class construction focuses largely on theoretical discussions, and the research on class construction

based on multi-case method is relatively rare. In multi-case studies, cases should be selected based on certain principles such as typicality, representativeness, data availability, theoretical relevance, and comparability.[4] For multi-case study, we selected four typical excellent classes from two Beijing universities to summarize the main characteristics of excellent classes by literature research and multi-case study.

III. Case study

1. Transportation Class 02

There are 29 undergraduates in this class, which has been awarded the fourth “Zhan Tianyou Class” of a university in Beijing. “Zhan Tianyou Class” represents the highest honor for a class in the Transportation College of the university. The students believe that cohesive class entails vitality.

(1) Powerful leadership

According to the students, it is the outstanding leadership ability of the class committee that has held the class tightly together to exert its combat effectiveness. Daily management of the class depends largely on the powerfulness of the class committee.

(2) Simple and effective management system

Class meetings were held regularly for their collective decision of class issues, and a communication platform was formed to facilitate students' exchange of information.

(3) Improvement in ideological, academic and organizational construction

Ideological construction is the foundation of class construction. Group classes, group day activities, National Day celebrations and other activities were fully utilized by this class to activate the enthusiasm and creativity of class members. Besides, class blogs and exchange meetings were created to cultivate students' ideological guidance and promote their learning of theoretical knowledge. Professor Ji Jialun was hired to ideologically construct the class.

Academic construction is the soul of class construction. Adhering to the good learning tradition and carrying forward the spirit of innovation, the class has formulated multiple measures to intensify its learning atmosphere. Focusing on the systematism of study, the class has propelled the construction of study style by the three perspectives of “learning”, “thinking” and “acting”.

Team construction is the guarantee of class construction. The class has also established several internal systems, such as “three meetings and one class”, “enlarged meeting of the class committee”, and “learning group at the end of semester”, effectively promoting students' study and life.

(4) Unique “family life”

“Family life” is their traditional class activity. The class committee has carried out colorful class activities (for example, visiting Zhan Tianyou Memorial Museum and the Imperial College, holding thematic lectures, heading to Babaoshan Revolutionary Cemetery to mourn revolutionary martyrs, and conducting football and basketball friendship matches and new-year parties) on a regular basis to enhance class cohesion. Besides, volunteer services were also organized among the class, such as “the queuing day of Metro Line 13”, cleaning of equipment hall, and the canteen volunteer day.

2. Instrument Class 41

The 26 undergraduates in this class are the first batch of undergraduates in the college of Remote Sensing Science and Technology in a university in Beijing. As the pioneers of Chinese remote sensing industry, they have taken revitalization of Chinese remote sensing industry as their class objectives.

(1) Guiding student cadre and effective class system

Many class members were selected as student union cadres, who have frequently discussed class construction plans with the class committee. Adhering to the working philosophy of “implementation, supervision, and counterbalance”, the class has evaluated student cadres by class member evaluation as well as their self-assessment. Besides, the students who have participated in competition activities were awarded.

(2) Identical collective & individual goals and strong learning atmosphere

Since the establishment of the class, the class committee has created class learning objectives, inspired members to develop good learning habits, formulated corresponding class rules, and irregularly inspected the class attendance rate. The class committee has also mobilized the whole class to carry out colorful after-school cultural activities and scientific practice activities, such as visiting the State Key Laboratory, and participating in the 30th Asian remote sensing conference.

(3) Teachers’ active participation in class construction

The head teacher and the counselor have actively participated in their class construction. The head teacher is responsible for lecturing professional knowledge and creating academic atmosphere, whereas the counselor for daily management and supervision. The class committee would also regularly collect students’ opinions and hold discussion among the head teacher, the counselor and the students.

(4) Development of colorful class activities

Featuring “promoting class construction through class activities”, the class committee has held a variety of class activities such as fun sports meetings, dormitory friendship activities, dinner parties, excursions and physical exercises, giving members more sense of integration.

(5) Development of scientific research activities

With the help of the head teacher and the counselor, the class has designed a variety of scientific research activities based on students’ characteristics and taking into account their major differences. To present students with the basic status and development trends of their major, the class committee has invited related professionals to give lectures. Besides, during the field-wide remote sensing experiments, students designed their experimental schemes in small groups and shared their views.

3. Energy Class 15

The 28 undergraduates in this class aim to build a learning-type class. Their class construction displays a continuous virtuous circle of “core leadership—effective management—individual members driving the development of the group.”

(1) Powerful leadership of the class committee

The monitor deployed their class planning in the first class meeting, which was continuously improved by the class committee according to the actual situations. The class committee would take the lead in study and discussion in the dormitory, actively solve difficulties, and harmonize the relations between roommates.

(2) Simple and effective class management system

The class committee has designed a once-every-two-week meeting system to be attended by class committee members and dormitory chiefs, discussing recent affairs and class management problems. In addition, a once-every-four-week class meeting to be attended by the whole class was also formed, mainly discussing student learning and development issues.

(3) Clear collective and individual goals

The class has set clear stage goals. For example, the class would help students adapt to college life and identify their development directions in the first year; and drive all students to develop in an all-round way according to their customized long-term and short-term goals in the second year.

(4) Harmonious relationship between teachers and students

The students have strived to clarify their personal goals and self-positioning with the help of the head teacher, the counselor and the class committee. Furthermore, sitting in the front during class, students would actively discuss problems with teachers in and after class. At the

same time, the class committee has set student examples in all aspects to facilitate students' all-round development.

(5) Strong class cohesion

Students have formed study groups to study professional knowledge together and share learning experiences. During daily life, they would care about each other and take turns to take care of the sick classmates. In the class-based competitions, collective discussions and efforts were common occurrences.

(6) Colorful class activities

The class committee has designed activities (for example, visiting the Olympic Sports Park, climbing Xiangshan Mountain, and holding singing & dancing parties and class debates) based on students' interests and hot spots.

(7) Learning-type class

The most obvious feature of the class is that there are several learning leaders, who have created a positive learning atmosphere to the extent that students would feel honored to begin study ahead of these figures. Self-study has become their class culture. Moreover, multiple learning activities have been conducted by the class committee, including learning method exchange meetings, self-study room visiting, and face-to-face communication with professors. Students with inferior grades would be aided by those with excellent academic performance.

4. Mechanics Class 11

There are 30 undergraduate students in this class, whose aim is to strive for the top in the class construction. The development law of this class is: the collective and the individual should supplement and promote each other.

(1) Enthusiastic and responsible head teacher and a class committee with strong execution ability

Under the guidance of the head teacher, the class committee has established their class objectives and class rules, such as semester start and summary class meetings, exchanging meetings by academic elders, and class committee change meetings. Almost all the class members have served as the class committee members, enhancing their senses of participation and belonging. With the strong support of the head teacher, the class has set up five research groups, allowing each class member to participate in science and technology activities.

(2) Clear collective and individual goals

Through collective discussions, the class has determined their goal of building a first-rate class. Specifically, their short-term goal is to be awarded “school-level advanced class”, medium-term goal “Beijing advanced class”, and the ultimate goal “school-level outstanding alumni class”. In view of class objectives and personal characteristics, students have made their personal development plans.

(3) Strong learning atmosphere

Under the leadership of the class committee, class members discussed study problems in their dormitories and studied together in a fixed classroom for the final review. In addition, the head teacher provided laboratories free of charge for students' scientific and technological productions.

(4) Rich class activities

During the football and basketball matches, the players were fighting hard on the field while audiences were cheering up. Each member's birthday would be accompanied by blessings and gifts from classmates. Also, group outings and recreational activities were launched frequently.

(5) Multiple scientific and technological practices

With rich experience in scientific research, the head teacher has guided students to carry out scientific and technological practices. Students have been divided into several groups, and they used their spare time to collect information and formed their topics through group discussion.

IV. Research findings

From the analysis of the four excellent classes, it can be observed that each class has its own advantages and characteristics. Characterized by professional feelings, Transportation Class 02 and Instrument Class 41 aim to revitalize relevant industries. Energy Class 15 and Mechanics Class 11 focus on learning and scientific research activities. The main characteristics of excellent classes are summarized as follows:

1. Realizing the individual growth of students under the common class objectives

Transportation Class 02 is an honorary class named after Mr. Zhan Tianyou, the “father of Chinese railway”. Taking Mr. Zhan Tianyou as a model, the class has set their class goal of revitalizing the railway industry in China. Standing out as the first batch of undergraduates of Remote Sensing Science and Technology in a university in Beijing, Instrument Class 41 has taken revitalization of remote sensing industry as their class goal. As students have chosen their classes based on their interests, their personal goals are consistent with the class goals. In their first class meetings, Energy Class 15 and Mechanics Class 11 have established their

class goals through collective discussions and recognitions, thus students' personal goals are in line with the class goals. Relevant research reveals that for excellent classes, individual goals are always consistent with class goals [5]. The class goal is not restricted, driving students to develop in a positive direction. The head teacher and the class committee have provided students with development suggestions according to their characteristics. The students who accept the class goals show strong demand motivation and have set their own goals, developed their ability and quality, and worked hard towards the class goals based on their own ideas and teachers' suggestions. [5]

2. Having effective organization management mechanism

Supported by the powerful leadership of the class committee, Transportation Class 02 has established simple and effective class management systems, constructing the class in ideology, learning style and team spirit. Guided by student cadres, Instrument Class 41 and Energy Class 15 have formed effectively standardized class systems. Mechanics Class 11 has established their class systems under the leadership of the head teacher and the class committee. It can be concluded that excellent classes share strong leadership and effective class management system.

3. Having clear and diverse class roles

Composed of students from all over the country, the four classes have all set their roles of class committee, ordinary students, and role models in all aspects. Transportation Class 02 has introduced ideological tutor, Instrument Class 41 and Energy Class 15 the head teacher and the counselor, and Mechanics Class 11 the head teacher. Besides, the class committee would assign different activity tasks to students based on their characteristics. The research thus uncovers that excellent classes feature clear division of labor, student role model, and teacher guidance.

4. Having favorable learning atmosphere and harmonious interpersonal relations

All the four classes share positive learning atmosphere and family-like classmate relations. It can thus be concluded that in excellent classes, students tend to behave like the rest of the class [5], forming positive learning atmosphere and harmonious relations among students.

5. Having strong class cohesion

Believing that cohesion entails vitality, Transportation Class 02, Instrument Class 41, Mechanics Class 11, and Energy Class 15 have all enhanced their cohesion through class meetings, class activities, and collective tasks. It can thus be concluded that the four classes have driven students towards realization of common goals by class activities, so that they could establish a sense of security and mutual influence, forming consistent value orientation while strengthening class cohesion. [5]

V. Conclusions and suggestions

1. Conclusions

Based on K. Lewin's group dynamics, this study analyzes and compares four excellent classes in a Chinese university by way of literature research and multi-case study, and summarizes the major characteristics of excellent classes:

(1) Excellent classes share common class goals. As class goals are closely related to students' personal motivation, students could determine their personal goals that meet their own characteristics to achieve personalized growth while fulfilling class goals.

(2) Excellent classes have powerful leadership and effective management mechanism.

(3) Excellent classes assign clear and diverse class roles to each student.

(4) Excellent classes feature favorable learning atmosphere and harmonious interpersonal relations.

(5) Strong class cohesion is another symbol for excellent classes.

2. Suggestions

In Chinese college education, class plays an important role in educating, managing and servicing students. In the face of the challenges during class construction, it is imperative to identify the main characteristics of excellent classes for better class construction. Taking K. Lewin's group dynamics as the theoretical basis, this paper aims to investigate the main characteristics of excellent classes and provide reference for the student-centered class construction that is characterized by strong cohesion, common goal, efficient management mechanism, diverse class roles and favorable learning atmosphere.

(1) Improvement of class cohesion by meeting class members' needs

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, human needs evolve from physiological needs, security needs and social needs to respect needs and self-realization needs. [6]Class generally needs to meet the members' social needs, respect needs and self-realization needs. Social needs (mainly refer to affection needs) can be met through communications and interactions among class members, developing deep friendship and mutual care among classmates.

Respect needs (mainly refer to senses of identity and value), can be satisfied through class activities and other forms of labor division, so that members feel needed by the class and gain confidence. Self-realization needs (mainly deal with members' needs of personal growth and development) can be met by class-wide growth activities such as learning style construction

activities. Therefore, the class cohesion can be fundamentally intensified from the perspective of human needs.

(2) Establishment of common class goals and personalized individual goals

A clear, achievable and positive class target should be built at the beginning of class construction through collective discussion and resolution. Class members' individual goals should then be set based on the class goal, the suggestions presented by the head teacher and the class committee, and their own opinions, achieving consistency between class goals and individual goals and thereby pushing all class members to work together in one direction. It should be noted that the established goals should be upgraded constantly through discussion of all the members.[7]

(3) Development of effective management mechanism

Practical mechanism stands out as the basis of efficient class operation. Before establishing an effective management mechanism, it is necessary to clarify internal and external class relations. For internal relations, the class operating mechanism should initially be constructed, including internal class mechanisms such as class committee system and class meeting system. For external relations, as a basic education and management unit, class should accept the common oversight of relevant party units, teaching units and administrative units [8]; therefore, a linking mechanism connecting the class with those units is necessary. Also, an internal evaluation system should be developed to promote class construction through evaluation of the class committee and class members.

(4) Diversification of class roles by stimulating class members' senses of ownership

To cultivate each member's sense of ownership [9], class members are divided into backbone members and ordinary ones. Backbone members should be cultivated in their senses of leadership, responsibility and dedication, encouraging ordinary members to strive for reaching the class goal. In terms of class management, students with high comprehensive quality and management ability are supposed to be elected as class committee members, and those who are excellent in learning, sports, literature and art should serve as class cadres in charge of specific fields. In summary, each member's enthusiasm for class construction and sense of class responsibility should be fully inspired through class activities and tasks.

(5) Creation of favorable atmosphere by promoting member communication

Communication and mutual cooperation are effective means to create a harmonious class atmosphere. [10] The class committee should formulate systems to address specific problems, encourage capable trailblazers to take the lead, design class activities according to the interests of class members, and diversify the form and content of class activities to help students communicate with each other. For example, to create a good learning atmosphere,

except for establishing specific learning systems such as collective self-study, the class committee should also take the students with outstanding academic performances as role models and develop study activities.

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