

The integration mechanism of labor practice and value guidance: a school–locality–enterprise collaborative path for labor education through university youth league and student organizations — a case study based on the "rural characteristics" project

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Abstract: Under the perspective of five-domain integration, labor education needs to achieve deep alignment with value guidance. However, application-oriented universities face a persistent contradiction in advancing labor education: practical training is prioritized, while guidance at the value level remains comparatively weak. How to forge a genuine, deep integration between professional labor practice and value guidance has become a critical question that must be answered as university labor education moves toward systematization. Taking university youth league and student organizations as a hub and the school–locality–enterprise collaborative mechanism as a vehicle, this study proposes an integration mechanism encompassing three dimensions—cognitive reshaping, situational experience, and meaning construction—and focuses on analyzing the complete logic from design to implementation of the "school–locality–enterprise collaboration" rural labor education project and its implementation outcomes. The results show that, under the hub-and-coordinator role of youth league and student organizations, the tripartite collaborative mechanism of school, locality, and enterprise can effectively integrate diverse labor scenarios, achieving an organic unity of labor value guidance and professional knowledge application. This finding provides a referable practical path for application-oriented universities to explore labor education innovation through their youth league and student organizations.

Keywords: youth league and student organizations; school–locality–enterprise collaboration; integration mechanism; labor education; practical path

1 Problem statement

Application-oriented universities face a structural conflict in labor education [1]: the practical training system is dominated by instrumental rationality, whereas labor education requires the cultivation of value rationality, guiding students to ask "for whom does one labor". The tension between these two logics has long reduced labor education to "training equals labor", excluding labor values and engineering ethical awareness. This contradiction is directly reflected at the level of youth league and student organizations: when league and student cadres try to "recruit participants", the most

natural question students ask is "What does this have to do with my major?" If labor content remains at a basic level such as sweeping and greening, resistance to participation arises. The starting point of the "integration of labor practice and value guidance" model is precisely to respond to this question: it enables students to see the application scenarios and social value of their professional abilities in labor practice, thereby transforming labor from a "passive task" into a "meaningful learning practice".

Tan Chuanbao points out that the fundamental goal of labor education lies in the cultivation of labor values [2]; Checkoway also emphasizes that the civic service function of universities should be embedded in their core mission [3], and that the focus of labor education lies not in skills training per se but in shaping the laborer's values. From an international perspective, systematic comparative studies have already been conducted on the models and curriculum implementation of labor education [4-5]. It follows that the key to resolving the contradiction lies not in doing the arithmetic of "labor + ideological and political education", but in mechanism-based connectivity between labor practice and value guidance. This is also a concrete attempt to implement five-domain integration in university labor education [6]—that is, labor practice carries multiple educational functions including value shaping, knowledge application, physical exercise, and aesthetic experience, and the key lies in what organizational mechanism can unify these functions within the same practice. This study explores precisely this integration model and tests it through the case of youth league and student work practice at the application-oriented university where the authors are based, elucidating how the integration channel between labor practice and value guidance is constructed, and whether this model can produce the expected effects in real educational settings.

2 The integration mechanism: a three-dimensional framework of cognition, situation, and meaning

This study proposes that the integration of labor practice and value guidance cannot be simply understood as interspersing ideological and political elements within the labor process; rather, it should form an integrated mechanism across three levels—cognition, situation, and meaning—that is, the operationalized unfolding of "the integration of labor practice and value guidance": cognitive reshaping responds to value reorientation, situational experience responds to professional application, and meaning construction responds to value internalization.

2.1 Cognitive level: from "how to do it" to "why do it"—a shift in thinking

The training of engineering students has long centered on "how to do it", while "why do it" and "for whom to do it" rarely enter the technical curriculum. The first step of the integration mechanism is to establish a "value-inquiry" pre-session before practice begins, using case-based discussions to prompt students to first consider the social implications of labor before entering the real labor field. The theoretical basis for this approach is Zhang Le's concept of "body-mind integration" [7]: the historical separation of physical and mental labor is the epistemological root cause of labor education being reduced to mere physical exertion, and contemporary labor education should reunify cognition and bodily practice through a "body-mind integration" pathway. Giles and Eyler also demonstrate that reflection is the core bond connecting service and learning [8]. For engineering students, labor practice is precisely the key medium for achieving this reorientation—the question is not whether labor possesses educational potential for values, but whether it is designed as an authentic task requiring cognitive engagement and meaning inquiry.

2.2 Situational level: from single tasks to multi-scenario practice

In standardized practical training, students play the role of "operator" with limited space for subjectivity. The integration model designs labor tasks as "situation-based problem solving": what students face is not abstract parameters, but concrete problems emerging from real social contexts. The core characteristic of such tasks is uncertainty—because

production conditions vary among farming households and equipment failures cannot be predicted, students must adjust technical solutions according to specific situations. Technical ethics and social responsibility thus emerge naturally in the process of problem solving, rather than being externally imposed.

2.3 Meaning level: from completing labor tasks to deepening value internalization

Meaning construction is the deepest and most difficult to achieve of the three dimensions. This study introduces Schön's framework of "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" [9], requiring students to complete a "three-stage reflection journal" after each labor session: the first stage records "what I did", the second stage asks "what does this mean", and the third stage reflects on "what does this mean for me"; Vygotskij's theory of the zone of proximal development provides cognitive support for this tiered design [10]. On this basis, Wenger reveals that meaning construction also occurs in collective narrative exchange [11]; accordingly, youth league and student organizations regularly hold "labor sharing sessions", forming collective understanding of labor meaning through communication and listening. The design philosophy of the above three-dimensional integration mechanism is concretely implemented in the four major practice modules of the school–locality–enterprise collaboration case below.

3 Case implementation: school-locality-enterprise collaborative practice exploration

"School-Locality-Enterprise Collaboration: A Shared and Win-Win Labor Education Project with Rural Characteristics" is the core case selected for this study. The project won the Second Prize for the 2nd Jiangsu Provincial Excellent Practical Project of Higher Education Labor Education in 2025. The case unit is the School of Mechanical and Power Engineering, whose industry-education integration orientation, engineering disciplinary background, mature youth league and student organizations, and both on-campus and off-campus practice resources provide a typical field for examining the value breakthrough in labor education.

Bringle and Hatcher summarized the core elements of service-learning curriculum design as "the bidirectional alignment of curriculum objectives and community needs, the embedding of structured reflection components, and the collaborative participation of multiple stakeholders" [12], providing a methodological reference for the design of the four major practice modules. The four modules respond to the three-dimensional integration mechanism through different types of labor, forming four value guidance pathways respectively: outcomes, process, responsibility, and professional empowerment:

- "Life Cycle Course" in the 30-mu Rapeseed Field of Weigang Village. Students experience the complete process from sowing to harvesting of rapeseed, identifying with the value of labor through the perceptibility of labor outcomes.
- "Time and Craftsmanship Course" at the Shuitai Village Soy Sauce Factory. Students combine physical effort with cultural heritage in intangible cultural heritage brewing, experiencing the meaning of labor.
- "Meticulous Care Course" at the Shuitai Village Peach Orchard. Students experience the weight of "responsibility" through meticulous labor such as pruning and bagging that directly relates to farmers' harvests.
- "Professional Practice Course" at the Shiyezhou Farm. Students perform equipment maintenance and troubleshooting, achieving the unity of professional knowledge application and value guidance in real-world problem solving.

The above modules form a progressive ladder of "outcome awakening → process internalization → responsibility construction → professional transformation", jointly activating the integration across the three levels of cognition, situation, and meaning through different types of labor. Holland points out that sustainable school-enterprise cooperation is built on three foundations: shared goals, institutionalized communication, and mutually beneficial distribution of interests [13].

This project operates through the "school–locality–enterprise" collaborative mechanism: youth league and student organizations undertake the functions of base liaison, task scheduling, and project coordination, co-building practice bases with 11 units, implementing a dual-mentor system, and establishing a dynamic scheduling mechanism in which villages and enterprises "dispatch orders" and the college "accepts orders". The core driving force of this mechanism is not university administrative push, but the genuine labor needs of villages and enterprises, embedding labor education into the rhythm of local production and life and giving it self-sustaining capacity.

- Integration effects. From 2023 to the end of 2025, labor education has achieved full coverage among 1,162 students, with labor value identification rising from 3.21 to 4.12 ($p < 0.01$), which echoes the findings of Astin and Sax that service participation promotes college student development [14]. Expressions in student journals confirm this change: "Watching the machine I maintained start running, I felt that the knowledge from textbooks came alive"; "Labor turned out to be so hard, yet so rewarding"; "After turning the sauce vats at the soy sauce factory for a whole day, I understood what 'the settling of time' means." The project has repeatedly won university-level excellent achievement awards for labor education and been covered by mainstream media. Zlotkowski points out that the key to integrating service-learning into the mainstream university system lies in institutionalized embedding rather than ornamentation [15], which leads precisely to the question of conditions discussed below.

4 Implementation conditions of the integration model

The above case verifies that the integration model is dependent on four supporting conditions.

- Authentic problem scenarios. All four modules are rooted in real production needs—farmers' harvests, the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, and farm operations — rather than artificially constructed teaching scenarios. It is precisely this authenticity that transforms students from "operators" into "problem solvers", enabling the social significance of technology to emerge naturally.

- Structured reflection system. Labor experience can be transformed into value cognition only through reflection [16]. In the case, the "three-stage reflection journal" and the "labor sharing session" respectively serve the institutional functions of individual meaning inquiry and collective meaning sharing.

- Faculty collaboration. Professional teachers provide technical support, while youth league and student organizations, in their hub role, coordinate project design, resource liaison, and effectiveness evaluation. The "dual-mentor system" institutionalizes the division of labor between the two types of faculty, avoiding the separation of teaching and value guidance even as they run in parallel.

- Outcome feedback channels. The perceptibility and immediacy of external feedback—such as growth in farmers' income, media coverage, and base awards—constitute key conditions for consolidating the effectiveness of value guidance.

5 Conclusion

This study conducts a systematic exploration of the integration model of labor practice and value guidance, proposes a three-dimensional integration mechanism of cognitive reshaping, situational experience, and meaning construction, and validates it through the practical pathway of school-locality-enterprise collaboration. It identifies four supporting conditions—authentic situations, reflection systems, faculty collaboration, and outcome feedback, thereby constituting a labor education practice system with youth league and student organizations as the hub, school-locality-enterprise collaboration as the vehicle, and the three-dimensional integration mechanism as the operational logic.

Compared with similar practices, the most theoretically inspiring contribution of the school-locality-enterprise collaborative model lies not in the sophistication of its institutional design, but in identifying a sustainable source of

driving force: the genuine labor needs of farming households and enterprises. This frees labor education from sole dependence on university administrative push, embedding it into the operational rhythm of local production and life. This "demand-driven" operational logic is highly compatible with the industry-education integration requirements of application-oriented universities, providing an innovative path with transferability for labor education through university youth league and student organizations, and offering an organizational reference for similar institutions in constructing local labor education practice systems. From the perspective of five-domain integration, the significance of this pathway lies in the fact that it does not simply equate labor education with physical labor or curriculum addition, but rather integrates value shaping, knowledge application, physical participation, and aesthetic experience within authentic productive labor situations, providing an operable path for the organic integration of the five domains in the second classroom.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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