

Thoughts on the design of the second class activity in agriculture universities - Taking Huazhong Agricultural University as an example

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ABSTRACT: Improving the education quality of the second class in agricultural universities and optimizing the design of its activities play essential roles in achieving the aim of quality education and cultivating all-round development research and applied talents for the agricultural universities. Taking Huazhong Agricultural University as an example, the paper probes the effect of the second class activity and the way to optimize it.

Keywords: agricultural universities; second class activity; practice and innovation

Agricultural universities should take the responsibility for the development of agriculture, the prosperity of rural areas, the increase of farmers' income and the cultivation of research and applied talents (Zhang, 2007). The research talents should have the innovative ability to independently solve the scientific problem and study the application of science and technology research projects, while the applied talents should be able to face the complicated rural area's situation and deal with the agricultural technical problem (Wen, 2006). In order to improve agricultural university students' professional knowledge, innovative ability and practice ability, to strengthen the ideological and political education, and to cultivate students' spirit of "based on agriculture, rooted in the countryside, served the farmers" (Yuan & Li, 2006), agricultural universities should not only rely on class to improve students' professional skills, but also should improve students' comprehensive ability by the second class activity which can build students' personality, explore their potential and foster their innovative spirit. Thus, the second class should be viewed as a vital tool to accomplish agricultural universities' talents training goal (Yan, 2006).

1 THE IMPORTANCE OF SECOND CLASS IN AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITIES

The second class activity has its unique value to achieve the agriculture university's talents training goal, which cannot be replaced by other ways.

Firstly, the second class activity is different from class teaching. The uniformity of class life often overlooks students' subject position and ignores the individual differences. Moreover, due to the fact that agricultural university students usually come from rural areas, they are poor in self-development, self-expression and self-exploration. Based on the class teaching defects and the special group of university students, the second class activities, featured by colorful contents, regard students' interests as the starting point, give students full freedom to choose, and aim to educate students in practice, which is of vital significance to improve students' quality, innovative ability, and other qualities.

Second, students have the full freedom in the second class activity. They are free to decide how to participate, what goal to achieve, what kind of roles they play and whether to give up halfway. In the traditional class teaching, scores or achievements are evaluated by teachers, which put students in a relatively passive position. However, in the second class activity, the evaluation is usually done by students themselves, by which students can fully enjoy the happiness of success as well as take the pain of failure. What's more, students will be more active to summarize the gains of the activity, which can exert profound influence on the cultivation of their personality and willpower. It is also positive for agricultural university to achieve the talents training goal and it also provides a convenient way to cultivate students' ability of confronting with the complicated situation in rural areas and the ability of dealing with agricultural technical problem.

In conclusion, the classroom education can only improve students' professional ability, and students are passive receivers. The second class, however, can let students have social understanding and experience, cultivate good personality, foster teamwork spirit and scientific innovative ability.

2 THE GUIDE ON THE DESIGN OF AGRICULTURE UNIVERSITY SECOND CLASS ACTIVITY

The second class activities should be designed as substantial in content, novel in the form, elegant in the style and clear in the guide, so that it can inspire students' spirit, improve study and exercise body. The types of the activities should be various, which can not only improve students' professional knowledge, but also cultivate their willpower and make them feel relaxed. As for the scale, we can not only design large collective activities, but also small group activities. The design of agriculture university second class activity should be aware of several purposes, which are as follows:

Firstly, aim-oriented: the second class must aim at improving university students' overall quality, fostering their innovative spirit as well as practice ability, and cultivating a group of research and applied talents who can serve the "Three Rural Issues" and build the socialist new countryside.

Secondly, system-oriented: influenced by the stable, systematic university culture, the design of the second class activity should obey the same principal, which means the activities must be held regularly and have a good organization (Zhou, 2011).

Thirdly, Multi-level guide: since agriculture university students have a special group structure, we should respect students' individuality and find their interests in the process of designing the second class activity. In this way, we can design various activities catering for different students' needs and let them find their own stages.

Fourth, feasibility-oriented: agriculture universities are widely distributed, and moreover, their material conditions vary from one to another. Thus, during the course of the design of the second class activity, agricultural university should make the full use of geographical advantages and resources to create more activities in a feasible way.

3 THE DESIGN OF SECOND CLASS ACTIVITY IN HUAZHONG AGRICULTURE UNIVERSITY

The second class activity in Huazhong Agricultural University (HZAU) is developed scientifically under the control of the School League Committee. According to the design principles of the second class, these activities can be divided into hands-on internship pro-

grams, technological innovation and academic contest, multi-level social practice program, the independent construction of campus culture and three-dimensional social work.

First and foremost, HZAU combines curricular courses and extracurricular activities, and pays special attention to the practice-based internships.

Practical teaching, an indispensable part of the second class activity, is an important complement to the theory teaching and an effective way to cultivate students' practical ability (Zhang & Zhu, 2003). While conducting theoretical teaching, Huazhong Agricultural University also attaches great importance to the practice teaching. To free students from traditional indoctrination teaching method, Huazhong Agriculture University increases the proportion of practice experiments. As for the teaching contents and curriculum system, we strengthen the logic links between different courses, aiming to optimize the curriculum's structure by the second class activity.

Taking college of horticulture and forestry sciences as an example, students take internship required by the curriculum every summer vocation. Freshmen often go to Art Practice Base in Hong village, a world cultural heritage site, to do watercolors, sketches and other art practice. With the advancement of study, sophomores who major in landscape architecture will go to Mount Lu to research on the rich plants species. The junior students will take internship in Beijing or Shanghai to study landscape design, floriculture, trees and cultivation of plants. Besides internships in holiday, school will organize a variety of hands-on activities and also set up the garden of trees' specimen, flower nursery, plant nursery and meteorological observation stations to make students know textbook knowledge well. Some experimental courses on economics, management, veterinary medicine and aquaculture also hone students' skills to solve practical problems by establishing a simulation room.

Secondly, HZAU encourages students to conduct scientific innovation by combining teaching and researching.

The important component of the second class activity is the academic culture activity, the aim of which is to enrich students' culture knowledge and cultivate their innovative ability. Encouraging students to conduct independent scientific practice and promoting innovative spirit are positive to hone university students' research ability. What's more, teacher plays a crucial role in guiding students, and independent research ability is the key to the cultivation of college students' creativity. Thus, Huazhong Agricultural University has provided students with a good opportunity to practice and research by the second class activity. In fact, innovative research activities have flourished. Represented by the "Challenge Cup" College Students' academic contest, HZAU has organized a lot of innovative activities. Under the guidance of teachers, students participated in the "Shennong Cup"

College Students' academic contest, start-up business plan competition, live electronics assembly contest, chemical experimental operation skills competition and a series of academic and technological activities.

Thirdly, HZAU combines the theoretical teaching and practice, and stresses the social practice.

Social practice is the largest second class activity. Students use their spare time to participate in social practice activity, which can make them have a better understanding of the society, grassroots, and people. Social practice is vital for the overall development of the agriculture university and plays an important role in fostering students' spirit of serving the agriculture industry (Wei Zhiyuan, Lou Chengfu & Mao, 2005). Huazhong Agricultural University vigorously promotes to the building of social practice system and incentive system, and moreover, that of social practice base for the full implementation of activities. In the recent years, Huazhong Agricultural University has successfully sent over 300 groups, more than 20,000 members across the country to conduct all kinds of social practice activities, like promoting science and technology, developing local culture and doing social surveys. They dedicate themselves to the construction of the new socialist countryside. Youth students have honed their skills in the social practice. Additionally, voluntary service activities have also become a common phenomenon: "concern on campus, concern civilization", "save, starting with me", "dedication to volunteer work, build a harmonious campus", and other main service activities and "six major projects" (i.e., flower project, sunset project, love tutoring project, a joint help project, sun Belt project, Poor Student project), "four action" (i.e., wetland ambassadors, empty nest action, sunshine action, love disabled action) and other activities brand have been built. There also emerged many advanced individuals, like Xu Benyu, Zhao Fubing, and Zhang Yu.

Fourthly, HZAU combines the science and humanism and enrich the campus culture through the second class activity.

"Creativity is rooted in the art and science". "Science and technology are primary productive forces". The second class activities can not only cultivate college students' humanity, but also inspire their creativity and improve moral conscience of college students (Zhang & Zhu, 2003). More importantly, it is able to enrich and activate students' creative thinking. On his inaugural address as President of Stanford University's, Heinrich said: "Exposed to the fast-growing world of technology entrepreneurs, we cannot ignore the indispensable arts and humanities disciplines that constitute our life."

Therefore, HZAU attaches great importance to the second class activities to build and enrich the campus culture. What's more, it also encourages students to carry out a series of innovative and colorful cultural activities in a scientific way. While having achievements in the academic construction, students have

improved their practice and innovative ability.

Fifthly, HZAU puts students in the first place and also respects their social work.

The design of the second class activities should focus on the growth of students, and proceed from the reality of students, allowing them to choose freely and take responsibility, just as Smith Ted, President of Yale University student, said: "You are the university!" (Xia, 2011)

In Huazhong Agricultural University, it is reflected in the flourishing student organizations. Student association is spontaneously formed by the students with the same interests. When they participate in the activities, students' personality traits are given full respect. In addition to a variety of societies, South Lake Youth Website and South Lake Youth Daily, which are edited by the students, have been the propaganda battlefield of school Youth League Organization, serving to demonstrate students' elegance and vitality. In addition, the Youth League and Student Union also attract a large number of students, which comprehensively improve the overall quality of students.

4 THE MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE DESIGN IN THE SECOND CLASS ACTIVITY IN AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

At present, the main problems in the second class activity in agricultural university are the long distance between the work place and teaching place, and ignore student's personality (Ding & Wang, 2008). The main misunderstandings in the design of the second class activity are as follows.

First and foremost, the design of the second class activity is too utilitarian.

The second class activities cannot be a flash in the pan. The purpose of the second class activities is not to show photos, good results, or collections, a kind of formalism, but should be truly beneficial to the university's talents training program. Therefore, the aim of the second class activity is cultivating students' innovative spirit and practical ability and educating a group of talents who can really serve the "Three Rural Issues".

Secondly, the design of the second class activity is blind.

With the impact of the market economy, many agricultural universities blindly pursue high profile without taking into account their own conditions. Even though their equipment and teachers are not well-prepared, some universities still pursue impractical goals to organize second class activities which cannot cater for the students' needs. Naturally, there is no doubt that students are uninterested in the activities. Thus, agriculture universities should define their own position and organize more colorful second class activities which are close to the students' life.

5 AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL EDUCATION OF ART TROUPE IN HUAZHONG AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

Huazhong Agricultural University Students Art Troupe was established in 1998 under the leadership of the Communist Youth League and the guidance of a group of well-known teachers, which has become a practice base for students' art education and an important class for quality education.

In terms of organizational structure, the art troupe has a head, four deputy chiefs, and directors from Comprehensive Department, Extracurricular Department, and Public Relations Department. According to school's professional features and personnel advantages, the art troupe has ten sub-groups, like dance troupe, choirs troupe, military bands, orchestra, folk music band, Western orchestra band, the host community, Jingzhe theaters, folk clubs and model team, owning of more than 500 members.

In terms of management system, the rights and obligations of members have been clearly stated, and the art troupe has also set up clear assessment system, cooperation system, activity system and reward system.

From 2011 to 2012, to create rich campus culture, HAZU has carried out "Yue Ya Plan", aiming at helping students to set up correct value system and promoting HZAU's spirit. This plan consists of art course which opens to all the students, art club which are the sub-clubs of the school art troupe, art garden

which are the training base, art lecture which are the other schools' art troupe. The series of activities and equipment can make the full use of art troupe's resources, which is of vital significance for improving art troupe's performance and students' artistic quality.

5.1 *An empirical analysis of art troupe's internal cultural education*

1. Empirical method and data

To study the effectiveness of art troupe's cultural education, the paper takes stratified sampling investigation towards the art troupe in Huazhong Agricultural University. Taking Likert scale method, the paper has designed five variables: (1) improving physical and mental health, (2) improving interpersonal and emotional intelligence, (3) improving ideological and moral consciousness, (4) improving the aesthetic quality, (5) improve creative thinking ability. Each variable has a number of descriptive statements which represent art troupe's corresponding cultivating function (see Table 1). To enable students to determine their level of agreement, the answer option is set to five classes, including "completely disagree", "do not agree", "unclear", "inclined to agree", and "totally disagree". Moreover, each class is assigned by 1-5 scores, from low to high, so as to measure the degree of realization of cultural education of the art troupe. Fifty questionnaires were handed out, and 49 valid questionnaires were collected. Then, the paper conducted thorough analysis on the data.

Table 1 the analysis of the effect of art troupe's internal cultural education

Function variables	Average evaluation	Functional description	Average evaluation
Improving physical and mental health	4.05	I always feel pleasant both physically and mentally in the art training as well as performance.	4.10
		Art activity can ease the stresses from study and life.	3.98
		Enjoying art can ease my depressed mood.	4.08
Improving interpersonal and emotional intelligence	4.13	Art trouper helps me to make many friends	4.22
		I feel happy to cooperate with others in the training and performance	4.33
		The activities of art troupe improves my interpersonal intelligence	4.16
		I improve my coordination skills in art troupe	4.16
		I become more outgoing and optimistic after participating in the art troupe	4.16
		I'm more willing to express myself after joining the art troupe.	3.90
Improving ideological moral consciousness	3.84	I feel more confident by art performance.	4.00
		The training makes me realize the importance of perseverance.	4.39
		The art performance makes me better understand the history and culture.	3.27
		The art performance can inspire my patriotism.	3.72
Improving the aesthetic quality	4.22	Joining the art troupe makes my life attitude more positive.	3.98
		Joining the art troupe improves my aesthetic quality.	4.22
		The art performance helps me to discover more beautiful things in life.	4.22
Improving creative thinking ability	3.78	The art creation has cultivated my creative ability.	3.49
		Art troupe makes me study more actively.	4.10
		The art creation has cultivated my imagination.	3.76

2. Result: The art troupe's internal cultural education has significant effect

Based on the survey (see Table 1), Huazhong Agricultural University art troupe has effectively realized its internal cultural realization, achieving an average grade of 4. This shows that the members of the art troupe have strong identity toward the educational function. From the various dimensions of the educational function, the members of the art troupe have greatly improved their aesthetic quality, physical and mental health, and interpersonal skills by participating in the activities. Meanwhile, the moral education and creative thinking still need to be improved, although it has a good effect.

5.2 An empirical analysis of art troupe's external cultural education

1. Method and data

The external cultural education of the art troupe can hardly be accessed by the theoretical model in the second part, so the paper evaluates the effect by surveying non-troupe students' participation in the troupe's activities and their recognition towards the troupe. The paper surveys on the frequency of students' participation, willingness to participate and degrees of recognition to access the effect of external cultural education of art troupe (See Table 2). The paper also designs three variables by using the Likert's scale table: (1) the importance of art troupe in university education, (2) the usefulness of art troupe's activities on university students' growth, (3) how the art troupe's activities help you to develop.

The choices are set as "having no effect", "having little effect", "general", "relatively good effect" and "having great effect", and each choice is assigned to 1 to 5 scores, which are used to access the degree of the realization of art troupe's educational function. The paper conducts survey on the students in Huazhong Agricultural University, handing out 100 question-

naires and retrieving 92 valid questionnaires. Then, the paper analyzes the frequency and data.

(1) Result: the effect of art troupe's external culture education is not that good

Participation is the premise of the external culture education of art troupe. To evaluate art troupe's external culture education function, we need firstly analyze students' participation condition. (See Table 2)

Judged from students' participation frequency, it is clear that only 6.6% students often participate in the art troupe's activities, while 50.7% students sometimes participate and 42.7% students never participate. The average students' participation rate to art troupe activities is very low. Judged from the future willingness of participation, 61.1% students will participate depending on the circumstances. Even 4.9% students are unwilling and will never participate in the art activities. Then, it is clear that over 66% students regard art activities are unnecessary activities. In order to confirm the judgment, we further probe the reason why some students rarely or never participate in art activities. It turns out that among the students who rarely or never participate, about 31% is uninformed of the activity information, about 42.9% has no time, and 23.8% has no interest of the activities. Through further interviews, the paper finds that those who do not know the activity information actually pay little attention to art activity. This has proved that plenty of students on agricultural university attach little importance to art activities. Moreover, there is a long way to go for art troupe to realize its external culture education function.

The external culture education function of art troupe is reflected in its role of educating the ordinary students. On the other hand, the ordinary students' recognition towards art troupe can also evaluate art troupe's external culture education function. (See Table 3)

As with the average students' recognition towards art troupe's education function, the data suggests that

Table 2. Non-troupe students' participation condition

Assessing projects	Description	Percentage%
The frequency of participation in art troupe activities, including art troupe performance activities	Often	6.6
	Sometimes	50.7
	Rarely	37.7
	Never	5
The willingness to participate in art troupe activities	Willing and probable to participate	34.1
	Relatively willing, depends on case	61.1
	Unwilling, impossible to participate	4.9
The reason of not participating	Have no clue of art troupe's activities	31.0
	Having no time	42.9
	Having no interest	23.8

Table 3. The average students' recognition towards art troupe's external culture education

The description of art troupe's external culture education function	Evaluation score	Standard deviation	The percentage of scoring over 4
The importance of art troupe in university education	3.72	0.7	62.8%
The importance of helping university students to grow	3.77	0.65	79.1%
The function of helping you to grow	3.28	0.91	44.2%

non-art troupe students believe the art troupe is the essential part of the second class activities, which plays an important role in university education. However, it also finds that although 80% students think the art troupe is vital for university students' growth, only 44% of them claim the art troupe helps themselves. This demonstrates that the external culture education of HZAU art troupe is not fully realized, and students stress art troupe has not realized its practical function.

6 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Combined with previous research, the paper has built model of the art troupe's internal and external educational function, the findings of which are as follows: (1) the internal cultural education has a significant influence on the students' physical and mental health, interpersonal relationships, moral consciousness, aesthetic quality and innovative thinking. Moreover, the art troupe cultural education has a more vital influence on students' skills than their innovative thinking and moral consciousness, (2) the external cultural education of the art troupe is not clear. This is reflected on the fact that non-art troupe student are unwilling to participate in the art troupe's activities. Additionally, although plenty of students agree that the art troupe has its educational function, they still claim that the practical effects are not so satisfying, (3) agriculture university students are so dedicated to the scientific research that they have no time to participate in the artistic activities, which reflects people's artistic pursuit are squeezed by utilitarianism. (4) the art troupe cultural education has a more significant effect on the art troupe students and art activity activists.

Then, the paper comes to the conclusion: (1) Methodically, the student art troupe has cultural education function, and the university should give them full support, (2) on the one hand, the art troupe needs to

expand its scale and attract more members to let the average students enjoy the beauty of art. On the other hand, the non-art troupe students should be encouraged to participate in the artistic activities. (3) There is still a long way to go for the art troupe cultural education effect to meet students' expectation. In this era, the student art troupe is supposed to improve its artistic and political quality, and strengthen the art troupe cultural education from skill perspective to moral conscience and creative thinking.

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