

Teaching a General Education Course on Gender in a University in China: Insights from an Innovative Experiential Learning Activity

Xuan Ning and Ruonan Li*

Department of Social Sciences,
Beijing Normal-Hong Kong Baptist University

Abstract

Gender education has emerged as a focal point in today's pluralistic society, as the construction of gender significantly influences personal identity cognition, well-being, and social interactions. In the context of tertiary education in China, gender-related courses are increasingly being integrated into general education frameworks, reflecting a societal attitude towards greater awareness of gender issues. To align with this educational paradigm, Beijing Normal-Hong Kong Baptist University (BNBU; formerly United International College) which adopts a liberal arts teaching philosophy, has developed a course named Gender, Family, and Marriage. Within this course, an innovative experiential learning activity, 'Gender Swap Day', has been incorporated to allow students to personally experience through the symbolic adoption of diverse dress codes, the identities conventionally associated with the opposite sex. This initiative aims to facilitate students' understanding of gender as a socially constructed concept. Results from the activity indicate that participants come to recognize that gender roles and expectations are not static, rather, they are socially constructed. This activity has resulted in positive learning outcomes for many students, including increased interest in gender-related issues and the development of a more inclusive consciousness. The activity has its limitations; for example, its design assumes a restricted

*Corresponding author: Ruonan Li. Email: s230032024@mail.uic.edu.cn

range of ways of expressing gender identity. Nevertheless, the insights garnered serve to inform the development of more diverse pedagogical and teaching approaches to gender education, thereby fostering a more empathetic societal awareness of gender issues.

Keywords: experiential learning, gender education, general education, higher education in China