

A Probe into the Working Path of Counselors in Normal Junior Colleges from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

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Abstract: China attaches great importance to the mental health education of college students, and clearly requires universities to strive to cultivate students' positive psychological qualities and promote the coordinated advancement of psychological nurturing and moral education. As an important reserve force for the future teaching workforce, normal junior college students' psychological state will exert a direct influence on the student groups they will teach. Positive psychology offers a new theoretical paradigm for counselors to carry out ideological guidance and psychological education for this group. Focusing on normal junior college students, this paper sorts out the major challenges counselors confront in daily work, discusses the enlightenment of positive psychology to counselors' work, and puts forward corresponding practical paths for psychological education. It aims to provide theoretical reference and practical guidance for the mental health education of normal junior college students, and help counselors realize the transformation of work paradigm from "problem-oriented" to "positive empowerment".

Keywords: Positive Psychology; Primary Education; Junior-College Counselors; Working Paths

1. Introduction

With the global advancement of the "holistic education" philosophy, the focus of mental health work in higher education institutions is undergoing a substantive shift: from a problem-solving-oriented model toward the cultivation of students' positive psychological qualities. For a long time, mental health services delivered by university counselors in China^[1-3] have centered on three core components: crisis intervention, screening for psychological disorders, and negative emotion counseling. The student psychological issues encountered by counselors on a daily basis are mostly depression, anxiety, and poor environmental adaptation. This working model plays a vital role in handling psychological crises and resolving emergent risks, constituting an indispensable part of university student administration. Nevertheless, it bears notable limitations. Its focus remains fixed on "what problems students have", prioritizing deficit remediation and behavioral correction while paying insufficient attention to students' inherent strengths and potentials. In other words, it can achieve "error correction and risk containment", yet hardly realize "quality improvement and empowerment". Even after students' immediate problems are resolved, deeper attributes including internal motivation, resilience, and confidence in the future are not truly activated.

The continuous evolution of China's educational policies has set a clear direction for student mental health education in the new era. The 2018 National Education Conference formally incorporated mental health literacy into the talent cultivation system of higher education. In 2023, seventeen ministries and commissions led by the Ministry of Education explicitly proposed to "foster students' psychological qualities such as love for life, cherishment of life, self-esteem and self-confidence, rational calmness, and optimism". This transition signals that university psychological education is shifting from "maintaining the bottom line" to "lifting the upper limit". Positive psychology provides solid theoretical support for this paradigm shift^[4]. Unlike traditional psychology which centers on pathology and deficiencies, positive psychology investigates human strengths, subjective well-being, psychological resilience and potentials. Its core proposition is that the absence of psychological problems does not equate to a positive mental state; conversely, individuals experiencing hardships may still possess psychological resources that can be activated. This perspective offers a new entry point for university counselors to reconstruct the logic of psychological education^[5-7], enabling a shift of work emphasis from "what problems students suffer from" to "what strengths of students can be stimulated".

Normal college students (three-year diploma level) constitute an important reserve force for the basic-education teaching workforce. What makes this group distinctive is that their psychological well-being affects not only their own development, but also exerts an intergenerational transmission effect through the "teacher–student" dyad, directly shaping the personality formation and mental health of the primary and secondary school students they will one day teach. Put differently, the inner confidence and positive outlook a teacher carries are invariably transmitted to their students.

In reality, however, normal college diploma students face pressures more complex than those of their counterparts in regular four-year universities. Academically, they enter higher education with comparatively lower admission scores, and many harbour doubts about their own learning capacity. In terms of further study, the competition for upgrading from diploma to bachelor's degree has become increasingly intense, pushing a considerable number of students into anxiety from the very first year of college. Professionally, teaching at the grassroots level enjoys limited social recognition, and the public holds persistent stereotypes regarding "diploma-level normal students." When these pressures accumulate, students are prone to a cluster of psychological difficulties, including diminished self-worth, blurred professional identity, inadequate emotion regulation, and weak psychological resilience [8-11].

At present, the psychological education work conducted by counselors in normal vocational colleges largely remains at the stage of "resolving problems after they arise"—centering on support for students with special needs, psychological crisis intervention, and routine behavioural regulation. While effective in handling emergent incidents, this model has a conspicuous shortcoming: it can "put out fires" but cannot "prevent them." Once a student's immediate difficulties are addressed, deeper qualities such as internal motivation, resilience in the face of setbacks, and confidence in the future are not genuinely activated. Over time, psychological education tends to fall into a repetitive "firefighting" cycle, making it difficult to build a normalized and systematic educational system.

Against this backdrop, drawing on positive psychology theory and taking into account the group characteristics and developmental pain points of normal college diploma students, this paper systematically examines the practical challenges faced by counselors in psychological education, explores the points of convergence between positive psychology and the cultivation of normal college students, and proposes concrete and operable practice paths. The aim is to facilitate counselors' transition from "problem correction" to "positive empowerment," to enhance the integrated effectiveness of psychological and ideological-political education in normal vocational colleges, and to offer a reference for fostering the psychological competence of basic-education teachers in the new era.

2. Major Challenges Faced by Counselors at Normal Colleges

Based on the author's four-year working experience as a student counselor at Ganzhou Teachers College and firsthand feedback from peers in multiple universities, counselors are currently confronted with the following dilemmas:

2.1 Misaligned Job Orientation: Overburdened with Administrative Affairs and Reduced Space for Student Cultivation

Student counselors serve as organizers, implementers and supervisors of students' daily ideological and political education and administration, holding dual identities as both teachers and administrative staff. Their nine core job responsibilities result in an extremely heavy workload. Apart from student class management, most counselors also undertake part-time administrative assignments for functional departments, such as organization officer and teaching assistant. A large proportion of their time is occupied by routine administrative work including scholarship, grant and student loan assessment, dormitory management, safety maintenance and data statistics. Consequently, little time remains for ideological guidance and psychological nurturing.

For this reason, mental health work has long focused on emergency response and crisis intervention, lacking systematic cultivation of students' positive psychological traits. Such a "firefighter-style" work rhythm also prevents counselors from gaining sustained professional fulfillment and well-being from students' growth.

2.2 A Unidimensional Approach: Problem-Oriented but Deficient in Potential Building

In the current work pattern, tasks cascade down from higher-level departments while frontline

counselors shoulder virtually all the concrete affairs. Confronted with students' psychological problems, counselors thus have little choice but to respond passively, operating through a reactive "occurrence–response–handling" cycle that reduces mental health work to risk screening, symptom identification, and behavioral control. The emphasis lands on management and intervention, with systematic, development-oriented guidance largely missing. This approach leaves students' inner strengths underexplored and, in turn, saps counselors' own initiative and creativity. Positive psychology, which centers on individual strengths and growth potential, offers counselors a new methodological point of reference—moving from "passive correction" to "active development," from asking "what went wrong" to asking "how to grow." It enables counselors to address students' developmental needs in their daily work while also strengthening their own sense of professional meaning.

2.3 A Distinctive Student Population: Teacher-Education Students at Junior Colleges Face Multiple Growth Dilemmas

Junior-college students in teacher-education programs exhibit several typical characteristics that compound one another. First, the rising academic threshold for the profession breeds a sense of inferiority and employment anxiety; some students take a pessimistic view of their own futures and lack the motivation to upgrade their credentials or engage in career preparation. Second, their professional identity is still taking shape. As the reputation of teaching fluctuates in online public discourse and parents grow increasingly conscious of protecting their rights, students begin to doubt the value of the profession and waver in their career choices. Third, their self-efficacy is generally low. Under the pressure of theory-oriented courses such as Pedagogy and Psychology and the national teacher qualification examination, they readily fall into a defeatist mindset of "poor foundation, cannot learn, cannot pass," and their approach to study turns passive. The counselor team, by contrast, comes from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, most of its members without training in education or psychology; when these dilemmas arise, they sometimes struggle to provide targeted guidance. Positive psychology offers a new framework for breaking through this impasse.

3. Enlightenments of Positive Psychology for Counselors' Work

The core concept of positive psychology lies in improving individuals' sense of happiness and life satisfaction, and it advocates enhancing overall psychological well-being by identifying and cultivating personal strengths and virtues. Currently, constrained by cumbersome administrative affairs and rigid working methods, counselors often rely on indoctrination and criticism to respond to students' diverse needs, which fails to achieve effective educational outcomes. Emphasizing positive emotional experiences, positive personality traits and positive organizational environments, positive psychology provides important enlightenments for counselors to re-examine their job positioning and optimize student cultivation methods.

3.1 Updating Work Philosophy: From Problem Correction to Strength Activation

Traditional work concepts tend to focus on students' defects and deficiencies, while positive psychology advocates discovering individuals' positive qualities with an appreciative perspective. Counselors should shift their work focus from targeting students' weaknesses to identifying and cultivating their strengths. For instance, for students who fail courses due to ambiguous career planning and employment anxiety, traditional intervention methods mainly include cause analysis, make-up tutoring and coordination with course teachers, which rely on external forces to compensate for students' shortcomings. In contrast, positive psychology proposes proceeding from students' personal growth trajectories, affirming their minor progress through longitudinal comparison, and stimulating their internal motivation. This enables students to build confidence through positive feedback and gradually improve their academic performance. Such a philosophical transformation transforms counselors from "problem identifiers" to "strength explorers".

3.2 Restructuring Work Roles: From Administrative Managers to Growth Mentors

Counselors' responsibilities extend far beyond administrative management; they should also act as guides for students' growth. Positive psychology redefines counselors' roles, driving a shift from "interveners" to "facilitators". On the basis of respecting, caring for and accepting students, counselors should take the initiative to discover and amplify students' merits. Post-00s college students have a strong

sense of self. Traditional indoctrination and one-sided constraints tend to trigger their rebellious mentality, which essentially reflects the awakening of their ability of independent planning and value judgment, laying a psychological foundation for counselors to carry out targeted guidance. Counselors should stop lecturing students in a one-way manner and instead use questioning and case discussion to lead them toward reasoning and judging for themselves. Descriptive language can take the place of evaluative blame: rather than criticizing, counselors acknowledge the emotion and help the student think through the consequences of the behavior. They may also delegate part of the decision-making authority in class management, turning discipline imposed from outside into a covenant the group has agreed upon. In this way, students' intense self-awareness is translated, within the framework of rules, into a commitment to growth rather than a resource for defiance.

3.3 Optimizing Working Methods: Integrating Theoretical Internalization with Practical Innovation

A background in education or psychology is not a hard requirement in the recruitment of college counselors; most of them acquire the relevant knowledge through training after taking up the post. There is therefore no need to expect every counselor to become an expert in psychology. What matters is working the key points of the theory into everyday practice. The operative essence of positive psychology can be put simply: look for strengths rather than faults, give encouragement rather than criticism, and build platforms rather than preach. These "three dos and three don'ts" fit naturally into concrete settings such as heart-to-heart talks, themed class meetings, and internship guidance. Counselors should also take the initiative in their own theoretical learning and, drawing on their personal growth experiences, explore working models suited to teacher-education students at junior colleges—helping students clarify their career paths, ease the anxiety running through the group, and set in motion a virtuous cycle of autonomous development.

4. The Work Path of Counselors from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

4.1 Heart-to-Heart Talks: Shifting from a Problem-Centered Perspective to a Strength-Centered Perspective

Traditional heart-to-heart talks usually focus on identifying students' mistakes and problems, which tends to intensify their sense of powerlessness and inferiority. The strength-based perspective advocated by positive psychology requires counselors to proactively identify and capture students' advantages and strengths. Taking the employment anxiety of normal junior college students as an example, simply persuading students to broaden their horizons often ignores their initial aspiration of becoming teachers. A more constructive approach is to start conversations from their experience of preparing for the National Teacher Qualification Examination. By passing the national unified examination, students have honed solid practical abilities through systematic knowledge review and repeated trial teaching. Compared with the internal qualification recognition adopted by some undergraduate colleges, this national examination experience equips them with more on-site interview experience. Counselors should guide students to recognize this unique competitive advantage, shift the focus of communication from "what I am capable of doing" to "how I can perform better", assist them in formulating targeted improvement plans, and transform their anxiety into motivation for continuous preparation and self-improvement.

4.2 Class Management: Replacing Negative Control with a Positive Classroom Atmosphere

Traditional class management overemphasizes institutional constraints and disciplinary punishment, which is likely to arouse students' resistant emotions. Positive psychology stresses the construction of positive emotional experiences and interpersonal relationships. Although universities adopt an open management model, colleges implement regulatory systems such as morning roll calls, evening dormitory checks and daily status reports for safety purposes. In the implementation of these rules, counselors tend to rely heavily on punishment while lacking positive incentives. The introduction of honor-based incentives such as Perfect Attendance Award and Progress Award can publicly recognize students' positive behaviors and foster an encouraging and supportive classroom atmosphere. Such positive experiences can be gradually internalized into self-discipline, and further transferred to students' future teaching practices. Students who have received positive recognition are more inclined to treat their own students in the same positive manner, forming a virtuous intergenerational transmission of educational philosophy and behavior.

4.3 Internship Guidance: Deepening Theoretical Instruction through Experiential Empowerment

Teacher-education students at junior colleges have ample opportunities for observational practice and internships, which makes a natural setting for putting positive psychology to work. Traditional supervision focuses on passing on teaching skills, yet it tends to overlook how students actually feel in a real classroom. The practice of experience empowerment is to structure the entire internship as a positive growth loop. Before it begins, students are guided to set their own question—"what do I most hope to learn from teaching?"—turning a passive assignment into active exploration. During the internship, they are encouraged to keep a daily record of "touching moments in teaching": a child's smile, a successful interaction, a sincere "hello, teacher." Such small moments accumulate into a solid foundation of professional identity. Afterward, sharing sessions on "the first time I stood at the podium" let students tell of their proud moments and unexpected gains, and the witnessing of their peers reinforces the sense of achievement. At the same time, students are helped to draw up their own "teaching strengths lists," redefining shortcomings as "future directions for development," so that every internship becomes an opportunity for empowerment rather than simply the completion of credits.

4.4 Individual Assistance: Correcting Fixed Mindset with a Growth Mindset

For students with learning difficulties or behavioral deviations, the traditional response is quick to label them, trapping the students in the self-denial of "I can't do it." A growth mindset holds that ability develops through effort; what matters is changing how students explain their failures. Counselors can guide students through a shift in their inner language—from "I can't do it" to "I just haven't learned it yet." Big goals are broken down into manageable small steps, such as "attend class on time three days this week," so that students repeatedly experience the sense of control that small successes bring. Every improvement deserves timely, specific recognition rather than a verdict saved up for the end-of-term summary. A dual-track record of "effort and progress" can also be introduced, letting students see directly how input relates to gains and shaking off the fatalism of a "fixed ability." Once students understand that a mistake is feedback data, not a negation of who they are, they become willing to try and to fail, and steady small steps accumulate into real change.

4.5 Self-Compassion: Counselors' Positive Psychological Construction

Counselors face unexpected student incidents over the long term, and the risk of burnout should not be taken lightly. Positive psychology applies to self-care as well; its core is to consciously rebuild a sense of meaning in one's work. Keeping a daily record of "three good things"—covering not only work achievements but also warmth among colleagues and small joys in private life—can effectively counter the negativity bias. Regular self-assessment of the 24-character strengths, identifying one's "signature strengths" and deliberately applying them to daily tasks, improves flow and satisfaction at work. A booklet of "micro-achievements" reframes trivial routines as "an umbrella held over students": a safety check made in time, a conflict mediation that worked—each can be elevated in value through the redefinition of meaning. Beyond these individual practices, counselors can form mutual-support groups of "positive partners" with their colleagues, sharing each week "the one thing I am most proud of this week." Through mutual witnessing, they break out of the isolation the job creates; counselors themselves thus become beneficiaries of positive psychology, and from this fuller state they are better able to influence their students.

5. Conclusion

The value of positive psychology lies not in its profound theoretical system, but in its integration into every detail of daily counseling work. The practical implementation of positive psychology is reflected in subtle changes: adopting a strength-based perspective to explore students' unique competitiveness in one-on-one talks, replacing one-sided punishment with a positive atmosphere in class management, fostering students' professional identity through experiential empowerment in internship guidance, and helping students transform the thought of "I cannot do it" into "I have not mastered it yet" via growth mindset in individual assistance. The sustainable implementation of these practices relies on counselors' ongoing positive psychological construction. By recording "three good things" and documenting personal "micro-achievements", counselors can enrich their inner world and serve as positive role models illuminating students' growth paths.

For counselors working at normal junior colleges, the application of positive psychology not only

facilitates the healthy growth of current students, but also cultivates future teachers with positive qualities for educational undertakings. Every experience of being seen and encouraged that students receive today will be converted into the warmth and attitude they bring to their own students when they stand on the teaching podium in the future.

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