

# The Application of Habermas' Theory of Communication Action to the Work of College's Counselors

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**Abstract:** Based on Habermas' communication action theory, this paper studies how to improve college counselors' communication ability. Firstly, the foundation theory and some related words were analyzed, explored, and arranged, resulting in three key factors of effective communication: intersubjectivity, symmetry and life world. Secondly, descriptive questionnaire survey was used to investigate 7 counselors in a university in Henan, China, and their successful communication cases were summarized and analyzed. The conclusion verifies the importance of these factors in communication actions. Finally, Combined with Habermas' communication action theory and the practical work of college counselors, some feasible suggestions were given to improve their communication ability.

**Keywords:** College Counselor; Habermas' theory of communication action; Intersubjectivity; Symmetry; Life world

## 1. Introduction

College students are the object of moral education in colleges and universities. They are young and energetic people, and they are the pillars of promoting social progress. Counselors, as managers of students' work, should play the role of talent mentors and bosom friends in students' growth and healthy life. Good communication skills are essential. Habermas' communication action theory emphasizes that human communication behavior is not a simple instrumental relationship between subject and object, but a kind of communication behavior to form mutual respect, rational communication and finally reach a consensus between subjects [1]. According to relevant studies, currently counselors generally have insufficient communication knowledge reserve, lack of communication experience, and a single way of communication. In the process of communication, they are often said to be civilized, stylized and arbitrary, resulting in communication barriers between them and students [2]. This study explores Habermas' communication action theory through literature, comprehensively analyzes the current situation of college counselors' communication ability in China, and then explores relevant strategies based on Habermas' communication action Theory. The author tries to provide reference for how to use Habermas' communication action theory to improve the communication ability and realize effective communication in the process of reporting work to the leaders and conveying ideas to the students.

## 2. Research on Habermas' communication action theory

Habermas is one of the most famous sociologists and philosophers in Contemporary Germany and the backbone of the second generation of Frankfurt School. Habermas' communication action theory advocates that the communication between people should reach consensus on the basis of mutual understanding, solve contradictions, disputes and conflicts through sincere dialogue, and finally realize the ideal of a rational society [3]. This theory has great enlightenment for college counselors in carrying out practical work.

### 2.1. Intersubjectivity of communication

Intersubjectivity is the transcendence and development of individual subjectivity. It overcomes subjectivity's tendency of subjectivism centered on "self" and advocates commonality and commonality

between subjects. It neither eliminates individual subjectivity, but emphasizes the unity and harmony of the whole [4]. Habermas' theory of communication action dissolves subjectivity and focuses on the structure and logic of intersubjectivity. It is the core problem in his theory of communication action, which is embodied in the socialization of individuals on the basis of maintaining individuality and individuality on the basis of maintaining socialization [5]. Habermas believes that under the communication paradigm, interpersonal relations are characterized by coordinated behaviors, mutual subjects and equal relations of interdependence [6]. Therefore, from the perspective of the intersubjectivity of the theory, communication is the interaction between actors and individuals through the medium of language. It emphasizes the analysis of "intersubjectivity" dialogue, advocates the rationalization of communication actions, and emphasizes the equal and natural dialogue between subjects.

## ***2.2. Symmetry of communication***

Habermas believes that the asymmetric exchange of labor and remuneration in capitalist society violates the natural law mode of equal exchange [7]. The requirement of exchange symmetry was further extended to the communication action theory by Habermas, which emphasizes that one of the characteristics of ideal communication situation is the symmetry between communication subjects [8]. To realize the presupposition of symmetry requirement of this theory, all special situations need to be put aside to make the role of communicating individuals take a secondary position. Only when communicating individuals can respect each other equally and mutually can their communication goals be consistent [9]. Therefore, from the perspective of symmetry of the theory, it is required that communicating individuals should express themselves sincerely and equally in the process of communication, even in the case of asymmetry of realistic roles, so as to achieve symmetry of communication behaviors.

## ***2.3. The life world of communication***

Habermas think communication background to the life world, communication activities are the foundation of life world to exist, he put the western philosophy in the abstract concept of "life world" critically combining [10] with real life, think communication activities to existing life world innate specification, acquired experience in activities at the same time, Rationalization of communication can be achieved through the combination of transcendence and experience [11]. It can be understood that individuals in the life world communicate and interact with others on the basis of existing social knowledge and culture, and store experience in the process of information transmission to achieve the purpose of communication.

## **3. The content and necessity of counselors' communication ability construction**

In recent years, it is not uncommon for college students to drop out of school due to psychological problems, and even all kinds of bad effects such as suicide, wounding, animal abuse and other matters also happen. As the counselor of ideological and political education of college students, his words and deeds have a great influence on students. At the same time, the counselor's work is the link between the school and the students, so it should give full play to the function of conveying the relevant requirements of the school and reflecting the relevant needs of the students [12]. Therefore, counselors should always pay attention to enhancing communication awareness and improving communication ability.

### ***3.1. Intersubjectivity in counselors' communication work***

The ideological and political work of college students is a dynamic process of persuading the educatees with theories and making them capable of applying them to social life after accepting theories. However, Chinese students have been inculcated by teachers, parents and other aspects since childhood, and have already developed antibodies to preaching. Therefore, in the process of real education, the content is too idealized and programmed, and the principle and stability are too strong to be synchronized with the real life, resulting in the reality cannot be combined with the theory. Counselors want to establish effective communication with students, first of all, they should understand the importance of communication, clear communication barriers with students, and adopt effective communication strategies. Studies have suggested that counselors work in cannot too to

strengthen the management status, in the process of communication with the students should pay attention to establish equal status, two-way communication, to strive to eliminate communication barriers, to establish harmonious relationship between students and the communication process, and Habermas's communication action theory of main body behavior equal natural dialogue, promote communication among the analysis of rationalization, It can get twice the result with half the effort [13][14].

### ***3.2. Counselors communicate symmetry in their work***

The work of counselors should ensure orderly classroom teaching, construct class organization, deal with emergencies, manage students' daily life, organize safe and stable work, etc. The above work content highlights the managerial and leading role of counselors [15], which is asymmetric with the role of students. How to establish communication symmetry under the circumstance of asymmetric roles has not been discussed in academic circles. However, some researchers have introduced the symmetry of Habermas' communication action theory into the field of education. They believe that when dealing with the asymmetric relationship between teachers and students, a third party can be set between the two asymmetric subjects to overcome the asymmetry between subjects. For example, in the relationship between "up" and "down", another "up" is set, so that the subject of the original "up" also has the role of the "down", so as to achieve the effect of empathy, and finally achieve symmetry in communication [8]. The work of college counselors has the characteristics of transmission and transmission. No matter in the process of communication with superiors or students, the above research and their own role characteristics can be combined to realize the symmetry of communication and achieve the purpose of communication.

### ***3.3. Counselors communicate about the world of life at work***

Heavy knowledge exist in the moral education in colleges and universities moral education leads to stay away from students' life world, methods, pay attention to instill and lack of experience and practice, preaching constantly deprived students say big language, communication process heavy executive orders ignored the students' subjectivity and so on four big features, serious impact on students and teachers, especially responsible for political education education counselor to communicate effectively. Habermas' life world is the background place where the communicative subject's communication behavior with language as the medium and for the purpose of understanding exists. In the process of communicating with students, counselors should pay attention to returning to students' life world, strengthen the life of moral education class, walk into students' life world, understand students' thoughts and thoughts, and implement the purpose of communication actions [16].

According to statistics, a considerable number of college students have the general psychological problems of yellow warning, mainly manifested as compulsion and interpersonal sensitivity, which begin to affect their study and life. They are often unable to concentrate on class due to the interference of ineffective inner stimulation, showing inattention and decreased understanding ability in all aspects [17]. Meanwhile, interpersonal conflict is also a prominent phenomenon in college students' life, and some researchers have found that interpersonal conflict is closely related to psychological symptoms [18]. Therefore, counselors who play a leading role in college students' study and life can learn from Habermas' communication action theory to improve their communication ability and achieve the purpose of reasonable and effective communication in their work. At the same time, it can also lead students to develop their own communication skills.

## **4. The present situation of college counselors' communication ability construction**

In this study, the subjective orientation qualitative research method proposed by Conrad, Haworth and Millar [19] was adopted to determine 7 college counselors from a university in Henan, China, who had more than 5 years' experience as counselors and dealt with overweight college students during this period as the research objects. Combined with their interview results and relevant academic research, this paper analyzes the current situation of counselors' communication ability construction so as to put forward targeted suggestions for improvement.

### ***4.1. Current situation and influence of college counselors' communication ability***

All the college leaders who participated in the survey think that the counselors' general

communication ability needs to be further improved, and the lack of communication ability is mainly reflected in the lack of in-depth understanding of students and targeted communication. Too strong utilitarian mind, lack of empathy in communication; Lack of professional knowledge and single way of communication; Inaccurate role positioning and ineffective communication actions. Seven college counselors agreed that the lack of communication ability of counselors will directly affect the effectiveness of conveying ideas and arranging work, and reduce students' trust in the role of counselors. Under the condition that work advancement is affected, counselors are also prone to self-denial, so as to dilute the sense of responsibility and value experience. At the same time, the prevalent teacher-student ratio between counselors and students is also an important obstacle to effective communication between counselors.

#### ***4.2. Counsellors communicate role setting issues at work***

Seven college counselors believe that most counselors have a biased understanding of their roles in the workplace, which may be related to the fact that counselors are generally young and inexperienced. Counselors communicate too passively with leaders and have the mentality of completing tasks. However, when communicating with students, they are often eager to solve superficial problems and ignore the cultivation of students' initiative. College leaders believe that counselors are as inherently defensive to their superiors as students are to their counselors because of their asymmetrical roles. Counselors should eliminate the defensive line in students' mind in communication work. By virtue of the "bond" characteristic of counselors' identity, students' role can be shifted to their own role when facing superior leaders. In short, in the role setting, to find the right point, in the final analysis is student-centered, practical and realistic work, sincere communication, correct guidance, effective help, successful training of each student.

#### ***4.3. Communicate ways to reach consensus***

Reaching consensus is the ultimate goal of communication. The seven college counselors agreed that allowing students to clarify the correct position for counselor communication was the beginning of reaching consensus. Counselors need to take action to solve the problem of many types, such as dormitory contradictions, conflicts between teachers and students, students' conflicts of interest, and even the contradiction between students and parents, etc., these problems are usually unable to discern right from wrong, need to open up with the counselor, the parties a clear position, to discuss the effective method to solve the problem. In the successful experience of 7 college counselors, students first have a cognition of their position, and then they will set up the direction to solve the problem in their heart. On the premise that students feel respected, recognized and empathized, they will sincerely cooperate with counselors to solve problems. Therefore, the seven college counselors all believe that when the counselors conduct communication, they should first put students and themselves in the main position, make clear the goal of communication, and work together to solve problems. Once students are regarded as part of the problem, even if students cooperate to solve the problem, they will be in a passive role, and it is difficult to accept the communication process from the heart.

#### ***4.4. Factors that contribute to effective communication***

To promote the effectiveness of communication, clear communication goal is only the beginning, to really achieve the goal, communication action process is the key. According to the seven college counselors, communication is two-sided, so counselors should not only focus on their own roles, but also consider how to guide students in the process of setting the right role to help solve problems. In practical experience, the seven college counselors all insist on treating students as independent individuals, helping students to jump out of problems instead of being trapped in them, and enabling them to think about solutions to problems from a clearer perspective. While performing the duties of a counselor, I also pay attention to putting down the identity of a manager, so that students can sincerely show their heart, including the influence of their growing background, living habits, learning environment and so on, on their inner world. In short, treating students equally and sincerely, standing in a united front with students to treat problems, understanding students' past, understanding students' present, are important factors affecting the effect of communication.

## **5. Reflection on the improvement of college counselors' communication ability**

Based on the consensus reached through discussion by 7 college counselors, this study discusses and analyzes the results from the perspective of Habermas' communication action theory as follows:

### ***5.1. In the process of communication, we should pay attention to the setting of roles and give full play to the main role of students.***

The process of communication should not be a one-man show by counselors. Only by treating students as independent subjects, guiding them to think about problems from multiple angles and giving play to students' initiative to solve problems correctly, can problems be solved from the root. This is consistent with the intersubjectivity requirement of Habermas' communication action theory. In general, students are regarded as the object in the communication process. Under the intersubjectivity theory, students and counselors should also be subjects in the communication process [20].

### ***5.2. Flexible way of communication, sincere language of communication, equal and respect to treat the communication object.***

In the words and deeds of communication, students should be guided to resolve the asymmetry between the counselor's work role and the student's identity, solve problems in an equal, flexible and creative way, and achieve the communication goal. Habermas' communication action theory requires that the premise of ideal communication is to realize the symmetry between the communication subjects. Some scholars suggest that a third party should be set between the two subjects in order to realize the symmetry between the asymmetric subjects and achieve the effect of putting oneself in the position [8]. In the process of communicating with leaders and students, counselors can set students and leaders as the third party in the communication work, so as to achieve the effect of "don't do to others what you don't want others to do to you".

### ***5.3. Only by understanding and understanding students can we gain their trust and promote the effectiveness of communication.***

Everyone is an independent individual, but each individual has its specific growth environment, living background, ability characteristics. To strengthen the understanding of students' life world, we can truly understand the inner world of the parties in the face of a dilemma or a problem, and find the root of the problem. The living world is an important concept in Habermas' communication action theory. Some researchers believe that the living world is not only the basis for the existence and development of human beings, but also the basis for the generation and development of all moral theories, as well as the basis for the existence of various contradictions, conflicts and problems [21]. Therefore, understanding students' life world is an inevitable way to fundamentally solve contradictions and problems and realize the effectiveness of communication.

## **6. Conclusions**

Based on the above research results, it is suggested that counselors should strengthen theoretical study, strengthen self-cultivation, improve systematic thinking, and think more deeply, comprehensively and flexibly in the communication process. To improve the understanding of the position, to understand the counselor's own words and deeds will affect the way of life of students, so we should take responsibility. Strengthen the deliberate cultivation of their own communication ability, regard the communication object and themselves as the main body, put aside the inherent roles of both sides, and infect each other with a fair, just, sincere and credible attitude. Do a good job of research, timely and accurately grasp the situation of students, understand the dynamic situation and growth background of students. At the same time, it is suggested that the university management should pay attention to the work of counselors in action, and guide counselors to pay attention to the improvement of their own communication ability with scientific and correct communication methods.

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