

Innovation and reform of college mental health education curriculum under the three-order four-dimensional teaching mode

--Oriented by the psychological characteristics of "post-00" college students

Guimin Zou, Siru Guo *

School of Guilin Tourism Institute, Guilin, China

*Corresponding author: School of Guilin Tourism Institute, Guilin, China
gsr1029838563@163.com

Abstract

This article focuses on the unique psychological traits of Generation Z college students and proposes innovative changes to mental health education courses. By introducing the 'three-stage four-dimensional' model, the article details the transformation path in terms of course objectives, content, and implementation. The aim is to enhance the courses' effectiveness in promoting the mental health of Generation Z college students, helping them better navigate the challenges of growing up and achieve comprehensive physical and mental development.

Keywords

Generation Z (post-2000) college students; Mental health education curriculum; Innovative reform; Three-Stage Four-Dimension model.

1. Psychological Characteristics of Generation Z College Students

With the generational shift in digital technology, "Generation Z" college students, as the first group fully immersed in the mobile internet era, exhibit significant paradigm shifts in their psychological characteristics. Research indicates that their cognitive development is deeply shaped by a multi-screen interactive environment. Their reliance on the internet for information acquisition leads to fragmented and unsystematic cognition. They are prone to anxiety when facing pressures related to academics, socialization, etc., yet are not adept at expressing emotions, presenting a paradoxical characteristic of "high sensitivity and low expressivity." Xinghua Zhou (2023) points out that while emotional expressions are richer among Generation Z students, featuring larger mood swings, they are simultaneously reluctant to communicate their feelings with others, resulting in strong emotional internal friction. Furthermore, Generation Z students generally show active engagement in virtual social interactions but relative withdrawal in real-life social situations, experiencing pronounced loneliness in real-world social interactions. Zhou (2023) suggests that as most are only children lacking sibling companionship, they experience heavier loneliness. Some students feel confused about the future, lacking clear life goals and value pursuits. These structural changes in psychological traits subsequently give rise to new adaptation problems such as fragmented cognition, high anxiety/low expression, emotional detachment, significant differences between online and offline behavior, and a lack of meaning.

On the other hand, with increasing societal openness, enhanced national comprehensive strength, and advancements in science and technology, "Generation Z" college students

demonstrate strong characteristics such as open-mindedness, active thinking, and strong innovative abilities. The diversification of socioeconomic components, organizational forms, employment types, interest relationships, and distribution methods also leads to pluralism in the social consciousness, values, and motivations for accepting ideas among Generation Z students (Zhiying Yang & Jing Dong, 2025).

2. Current Dilemmas in College Mental Health Education Curricula

At present, the mental health education curriculum is facing three adaptation difficulties:

First, the teaching content and means are not matched with the current cognitive characteristics of students. At present, most colleges and universities' mental health courses are based on basic theory, lacking pertinence and practicability, which is out of line with students' actual needs and difficult to deal with students' specific psychological problems.

Second, the teaching models and methods are traditional. Some universities' mental health courses use outdated teaching methods and lack innovative approaches and practical components, which makes it difficult to engage students and boost their interest. Moreover, the course evaluation and feedback mechanisms are inadequate, making it challenging to adjust and refine the teaching content and methods based on student feedback in a timely manner.

Third, the system is not complete: many colleges and universities regard mental health education as a general course, and there is insufficient integration and intersection with other disciplines. At the same time, the continuity and systematization of the courses are lacking, and there is no connection between the courses, so a long-term education mechanism covering the whole university career of students has not been formed.

Therefore, the construction of a curriculum innovation system based on the psychological characteristics of the current generation 00 is not only related to the improvement of education effectiveness, but also the key path to implement the "developmental mental health education" strategy (Special Action Plan for Comprehensive Strengthening and Improving Mental Health Work for Students in the New Era, 2023).

3. The "Three-Stage Four-Dimension" Teaching Model

3.1. "Three stages" target system

Basic stage (cognitive awakening): The core goal is psychological visualization and self-cognition calibration. With the help of psychological evaluation big data portrait and teaching methods such as house-tree-person, and based on metacognition theory, students are helped to clearly understand their own psychological state and cognitive characteristics, and correct self-cognition bias.

Development stage (ability reconstruction): focus on improving emotional granularity and digital social adjustment. Script killing or role-playing are activities that students like more. Based on emotion regulation theory, students can accurately identify and express emotions, adapt to digital social environment, and improve emotional management and social skills.

Superior stage (will cultivation): committed to cultivating career resilience and reconstructing meaning system. Through life tree and other methods, according to the theory of psychological capital, students are trained to cope with professional challenges and help them build a positive life meaning system.

3.2. "Four-dimensional" content framework

Cognitive reconstruction dimension: to solve the "fragmented cognitive trap" caused by network information overload, design cognitive connection activities, guide students to learn to integrate information, and improve the systematicity and depth of cognition.

Emotional cultivation dimension: to deal with the characteristics of "high anxiety and low expression", students' ability of emotion recognition and expression can be improved through immersive activities, and their anxiety can be relieved.

Behavior training dimension: classroom role-playing simulation training is adopted to enhance the transfer of students' classroom theoretical knowledge to offline behavior activities and promote the balance between online and offline behaviors.

Value leading dimension: to respond to the problem of "sense of meaning loss", design "hollow disease" intervention program, guide students to explore the meaning of life, establish correct values and life goals.

The application of the "third-order four-dimensional" model to mental health education courses can accurately match the psychological characteristics of college students born in the 2000s, comprehensively improve students' psychological quality from multiple dimensions, and enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of the course.

4. Innovative Reform of Mental Health Education Curriculum Based on the TSFD Model--Taking Life Education as an Example

With the overarching goal of promoting the mental health and all-round development of Generation Z college students, we divided all students into several groups before class, with each group consisting of 5 to 8 members. A group leader was appointed for each group. Before the activities began, all group leaders were given learning tasks and received professional training to ensure they understood the content of each chapter of the life education course and the tasks required. This ensured the smooth progress of the course and the achievement of its goals. By integrating the 'three-stage' goal system, specific teaching objectives were set at the cognitive, emotional, and volitional levels.

4.1. Program objective

Basic stage (cognitive awakening): Cultivate students' ability to recognize themselves in life, and be able to understand life through curriculum teaching, so as to realize the cognitive differences of "I" at each stage in life.

Development stage (emotional remodeling): Improve the ability to perceive positive emotions, and learn to be grateful for life, love life and respect life through the class.

Superior stage (willpower development): Enhance personal willpower and sense of meaning in life.

4.2. Course setting

Integrate the "four-dimensional" content: organically integrate the four dimensions of cognition reconstruction, emotion cultivation, behavior training and value guidance into the curriculum. In teaching, students are guided to reflect and grow in the cognitive, emotional, behavioral and value aspects through case analysis, practical activities and other methods.

Cognitive Reconstruction Stage: This stage aims to develop students' ability to understand themselves through life experiences. By watching "The Origin of Life," students are guided to reflect on what life is and the value of each life, helping them gain a deeper understanding of life. The group counseling activity "Life Tree" further aids students in recognizing their past and present selves. In this activity, teachers first introduce familiar trees in daily life, explaining their shapes and structures. Students are encouraged to share beautiful memories related to trees from their growth experiences. The teacher then introduces the metaphor of the life tree, guiding students to draw their own life trees and mark each part. Teachers provide colored pens and paper, encouraging students to color their life trees. Students are encouraged to use different parts of the tree to represent various aspects of their lives, such as using the roots to

symbolize the life experiences that provide strength, including warm memories from early years, family traditions, or local cultural resources. Through this activity, students can see the power of life, reflecting on their past self, present self, psychological self, and social self.

The emotional cultivation stage aims to develop students' ability to appreciate, be grateful for, and respect life. This stage introduces the concept of life drama to enhance the course's vitality and appeal. By focusing on a specific theme of the course and using life drama performances, it reflects real-life scenarios and stories from the journey of life, which can provoke reflection and resonance among college students. Through these life events, students gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of life and living.

The behavioral training stage aims to enhance personal willpower and sense of life meaning. Based on the common feelings of frustration and loneliness experienced by post-00s college students during their college years, a script killing activity is designed to help students understand, accept and explore coping methods for frustration and loneliness, so as to realize and accept life.

The value guidance phase aims to help students develop a correct perspective on life, values, and values. By showing videos of inspiring figures, students are encouraged to reflect on the meaning of life. After class, students are assigned a 21-day check-in task, where they are required to share three good things they feel fortunate about each day for the next three weeks, reinforcing their positive emotional experiences.

5. Conclusion

Innovations in mental health education courses for Generation Z college students, guided by their psychological traits, have been introduced through the 'three-stage four-dimensional' model. This approach aims to comprehensively innovate course objectives, content, and implementation, offering new ideas and methods to enhance the mental health of Generation Z college students. Throughout the implementation process, it is essential to continuously strengthen teacher training and improve the teaching evaluation system to ensure that the course reform yields practical results, thereby supporting the healthy growth of Generation Z college students.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support from university-level scientific research project of Guilin University of Tourism in 2023 (No.2023Z10).

References

- [1] Fu Lisha. (2023). A Study on the New Trends of Role Model Recognition among Post-00s College Students and Guidance Strategies. *Journal of Ideological and Theoretical Education*, 2023 (1),126-131. <https://doi.org/10.16580/j.sxlljydk.2023.01.006>
- [2] Geng Haixia. (2022). Research on the Ideological and Behavioral Characteristics of Post-00s College Students in the New Era and Strategies for Education and Guidance. *Science, Education, and Culture Review*, 2022(11),41-44. <https://doi.org/10.16871/j.cnki.kjwh.2022.11.013>
- [3] The Ministry of Education and 16 other departments have launched the Special Action Plan for Comprehensive Strengthening and Improving Students' Mental Health in the New Era (2023-2025) [Z]. May 11,2023.
- [4] Li Zhongyan, Luo Wenhao, and Hu Juhua (2021). The Dilemma and Breakthrough of College Students' Mental Health Education Curriculum Construction. *Heilongjiang Higher Education Research*, 2021(12),145-149. <https://doi.org/10.19903/j.cnki.cn23-1074/g.2021.12.025>

- [5] Lu Kexin, Yao Yuhong, and Gao Jianfeng. (2024). Life Education for College Students: A Life-Level Perspective and Curriculum Content Construction. *Educational Exploration*, 2024 (8),58-62. [https://doi.org/10.1002-0845\(2024\)08-0058-05](https://doi.org/10.1002-0845(2024)08-0058-05)
- [6] Hou Lei. (2024). Analysis of Psychological Characteristics and Mental Health Education Strategies for Post-00s College Students -- Based on Counselor's Practical Work Cases. *Huazhang*, 2024 (1st Half), 78-80.
- [7] Sun Guosheng and Xue Chunyan (2020). Mental health education of college students from the perspective of life education. *School Party Building and Ideological Education*, (11),71-72. <https://doi.org/10.19865/j.cnki.xxdj.2020.21.019>
- [8] Sun Xuyuan. (2020). A Brief Discussion on the Psychological Characteristics of Post-00s College Students and the Breakthrough of Mental Health Education Work Mode. *Education Modernization*, 7(5),193-194.<https://doi.org/10.16541/j.cnki.2095-8420.2020.5.092>
- [9] Wang Chunliu. (2022). Research on the Application of Ideological and Political Elements in College Students' Mental Health Education Courses [Research Results]. *Zhejiang Gongmao Vocational and Technical College*.
- [10] Wang Li, Ma Li, and Chen Yuhua (2019). Strategies for the Implementation of Life Education Courses for College Students. *Gansu Journal of Higher Normal University*, 24 (4),78-80. [https://doi.org/10.1008-9020\(2019\)04-0078-04](https://doi.org/10.1008-9020(2019)04-0078-04)
- [11] Wei Lu. (2023). "The Ideological and Political Education of Post-00s College Students: The Impact of the Internet and Its Mitigation". *Research on Ideological and Political Education*, 39(3),162-168. <https://doi.org/10.15938/j.cnki.iper.2023.03.029>
- [12] Yang Zhiying and Dong Jing (2025). "Exploring the 'Preconceived' Factors in the Ideological Acceptance of Post-00s College Students". *School Party Building and Ideological Education*, 5, 54-56. <https://doi.org/10.19865/j.cnki.xxdj.2025.05.012>
- [13] Yin Xin and Dou Lijun (2018). An Inquiry into the Educational Management Model of Post-00s College Students. *Education Modernization*, 5(17),189-190,213.<https://doi.org/10.16541/j.cnki.2095-8420.2018.17.081>
- [14] Zheng Wen, Chen Liwei, and Gui Yong. (2025). Understanding the 'Self': Common Values of Generation Z and Millennials and Their Intergenerational Evolution Trends. *Social Sciences Journal*, 2025(1),169-175. [https://doi.org/10.1001-6198\(2025\)01-0169-07](https://doi.org/10.1001-6198(2025)01-0169-07)
- [15] Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. *Blue Book on Chinese College Students' Social Media Use and Mental Health (2023)* [R]. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2023.
- [16] Zhou Xinghua. (2023). Study on the Psychological Characteristics and Educational Guidance Strategies of College Students born in the 2000s. *Education Modernization*, 11 (162),162-164. <https://doi.org/10.15938/j.cnki.iper.2023.03.029>