

Exploration on the Construction of the Theoretical System and the Practical Logic of Mental Health Education in Colleges and Universities under the "Five Interlocking Rings" Education Model

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Abstract

Guided by the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and the goal of promoting students' all-round development, the fundamental and strategic role of mental health education in colleges and universities has become increasingly prominent. Based on the theoretical underpinnings of collaborative governance theory, ecosystem theory, and positive psychology concepts, this paper systematically constructs and theoretically explains a "Five Interlocking Rings" education model for mental health education in colleges and universities, which centers on the five pillars of "establishing mechanisms, strengthening teams, building platforms, emphasizing services, and creating characteristics". Through the in-depth integration and coordinated drive of five core links—system guarantee, team empowerment, carrier creation, service optimization, and characteristic refinement—this model aims to build a mental health education ecosystem featuring "full participation, whole-process coverage, and all-round integration". Research shows that the "Five Interlocking Rings" model provides a universal theoretical framework and practical path for addressing bottleneck issues in college mental health education, such as insufficient systematicness, lack of coordination, and inadequate precision. It also offers important implications for enhancing the scientificity, systematicness, and effectiveness of mental health education initiatives in colleges and universities.

Keywords

Mental health education in colleges and universities; Five Interlocking Rings; education model; collaborative mechanism; theoretical system; practical logic.

1. Introduction

The Mission and Challenges of Mental Health Education in Colleges and Universities in the New Era Against the backdrop of the New Era, characterized by accelerated social changes, mounting competitive pressure, and diversified values, college students face unprecedented and complex challenges in academic development, career planning, interpersonal communication, and emotional experience^[1]. Their mental health directly bears on the quality of talent cultivation and the realization of individual life value. The Party and the state attach great importance to students' mental health work, regarding it as a key link in implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and nurturing new-era talents who can shoulder the responsibility of national rejuvenation. However, a review of the current practice of mental health education in colleges and universities reveals widespread theoretical dilemmas and practical problems: First, there is insufficient mechanism coordination – the multi-party linkage mechanism among universities, colleges, families, society, and medical institutions has not been effectively connected, with barriers existing in resource integration and shared responsibility. Second, there is an imbalance between the professionalism and universality of the education

team: limited full-time resources create tension with the diverse needs of educational subjects, and the ability of non-professional teams to identify and intervene in mental health issues requires urgent improvement^[2]. Third, there is inadequate precision in service provision – the connection between preventive/developmental services and interventive/therapeutic services is not close enough, failing to effectively match students' differentiated and stage-specific mental health needs. Fourth, there is a lack of distinctiveness in educational carriers: mental health work is not sufficiently integrated with disciplinary features, campus culture, and ideological and political education, resulting in room for improvement in the appeal and impact of education^[3]. To address these challenges, there is an urgent need to develop a systematically integrated and collaboratively efficient theoretical model and practical framework. Based on this, this study proposes and delves into the "Five Interlocking Rings" mental health education model, aiming to provide a theoretical reference for the systematic and scientific development of mental health education in colleges and universities.

2. Theoretical Foundation and Core Connotation of the "Five Interlocking Rings" Talent Cultivation Model

The "Five Interlocking Rings" model is not a fragmented assembly of concepts, but is rooted in a solid theoretical foundation: Collaborative Governance Theory: It emphasizes that multiple subjects (including various school departments, families, medical institutions, social organizations, etc.), based on shared goals, maximize overall effectiveness through institutional arrangements, resource integration, information sharing, and action coordination. This theory provides support for the "mechanism establishment" component, requiring the construction of a governance network that connects all levels and links all subjects. Positive Psychology Concepts: They advocate shifting the focus from addressing psychological problems to fostering positive psychological qualities, exploring potential, and enhancing sense of well-being. These concepts provide a value orientation for the components of "strengthening the team" (emphasizing whole-staff education and stimulating students' subjectivity), "creating characteristics" (carrying out diverse developmental activities), and "prioritizing services" (emphasizing prevention and development).

With the core goals of improving students' psychological literacy and promoting their all-round development, the "Five Interlocking Rings" model takes systems as guarantee, teams as support, carriers as basis, services as core, and characteristics as driving force. It constitutes a closed-loop system consisting of five interdependent and mutually promoting key components: Establishing Mechanisms (System Guarantee Ring): Construct an integrated institutional system covering top-level design, operation standards, collaborative linkage, crisis intervention, and effectiveness evaluation. Strengthening Teams (Whole-Staff Main Force Ring): Build a multi-level education team that combines professional full-time teams, universal part-time teams (including counselors, mentors, and administrators), and peer student backbone echelons. Building Platforms (Multi-Dimensional Space Ring): Develop a three-dimensional education carrier matrix featuring online-offline integration, in-class and after-class integration, and the combination of explicit and implicit education. Prioritizing Services (Precise Protection Ring): Establish a full-chain service system covering popularization education, precise screening, developmental guidance, counseling intervention, crisis management, and referral treatment, with emphasis on prevention-oriented approach, timely intervention, and development-oriented orientation. Creating Characteristics (Value-Driven Ring): Based on the school type, disciplinary characteristics, and cultural traditions, develop brand projects and deepen the integrated innovation of psychological education with ideological and political education, disciplinary and professional education, campus culture construction, as well as physical education, aesthetic education, and labor education. These five rings are not arranged

linearly; instead, they are interlocked and mutually supportive, jointly forming a psychological education ecosystem characterized by dynamic balance and synergistic efficiency.

3. System Construction and Practical Logic of the "Five Interlocking Rings" Talent Cultivation Model

Establishing Mechanisms: Laying a Foundation with Systems and Building a Collaborative Governance Framework. Goal-oriented Top-level Design: Incorporate mental health education into the school's overall development plan and talent cultivation program, and clarify the education goals, responsible entities, and resource allocation. Standardized Operational Systems: Formulate management regulations and operating guidelines covering the entire work process (planning, implementation, supervision, evaluation, and crisis handling) to ensure the work follows rules and standards and proceeds in an orderly manner. Collaborative Linkage Mechanism: Establish a four-level vertical connection mechanism covering "school-college-class-dormitory," and strengthen horizontal collaboration among the student affairs department, academic affairs department, security department, logistics department, and medical department; build a "school-family-hospital-society" information sharing and joint response platform, and define the responsibility boundaries and collaboration processes of all parties. Scientific Evaluation and Feedback Mechanism: Establish a diversified evaluation system based on the combination of process and result, as well as quantification and qualification, to provide timely feedback and optimize system design.

Strengthening Teams: Professional Empowerment and Activating the Momentum of Whole-Staff Education. Construction of Professional Full-Time Teams: Allocate sufficient personnel and strengthen the full-time team of mental health education teachers, ensure their professional development, supervisory training, and career promotion channels, and enhance their core competencies (assessment, counseling, teaching, crisis intervention, research). Cultivation of Universal Part-Time Teams: Systematically carry out mental health knowledge popularization and skill training for counselors, academic mentors, graduate supervisors, class advisors, as well as administrative and logistics staff, to improve their awareness of psychological education and their initial ability to identify, communicate, and refer (cases). Construction of Peer-Based Backbone Networks: Conduct scientific selection and systematic training for class psychological committee members, dormitory information officers, and student Party member backbones, give play to their roles in "peer support, information bridging, and activity organization," and establish a peer support network covering grassroots units. Enhancement of School-Family Collaborative Capacity: Popularize mental health knowledge through parent schools, online resources, and communication manuals, enhance family education capacity, and promote consistent concepts and coordinated actions between schools and families.

Building Platforms: Carrier Innovation and Expanding Immersive Education Spaces. Construction of Smart Online Platforms: Utilize official websites, WeChat official accounts, apps, and online course platforms to build a digital service platform integrating knowledge popularization, resource access, self-help tools, online reservations, and crisis hotlines, enabling "non-stop educational services." Optimization of Physical Offline Venues: Build and utilize well the Mental Health Education Center (including counseling rooms, group counseling rooms, catharsis rooms, sandplay rooms, etc.); extend education spaces to student communities (one-stop community service centers), academies, laboratories, libraries, and other living and learning venues, and create an "immersive" psychological and cultural environment. Integration into the Main Classroom Channel: organically integrate mental health education elements into Ideological and Political Theory Courses, Situation and Policy Courses, Career Planning Courses, and professional course teaching; offer high-quality compulsory and elective

courses on mental health education. Expansion of Practical Activity Platforms: Rely on carriers such as Party and League organizations, student associations, classes, and dormitories to design and carry out diverse and content-rich activities including theme class meetings, group counseling, salon lectures, and cultural and sports activities, fostering a positive, upward, and mutually supportive campus atmosphere.

Prioritizing Services: Precise Targeting and Consolidating a Full-Chain Protection System. Popularization-Oriented Education and Atmosphere Building: Regularly carry out Mental Health Knowledge Promotion Month (Week), thematic lectures, and special exhibitions to popularize mental health concepts, eliminate stigma, and create a campus culture that values mental health. Precision Screening and Dynamic Monitoring: Standardize the implementation of mental health surveys for new students and establish students' mental health files; conduct phased screening and key investigation in conjunction with key time nodes (enrollment, examinations, graduation, seasonal transitions); establish a college/department mental health monthly/weekly report system to dynamically track students' mental status. Diversified Development and Counseling Services: Provide diversified and developmental services such as individual counseling, group counseling, growth groups, career planning, learning strategies, and interpersonal relationship guidance; ensure the professionalism, standardization, and accessibility of psychological counseling services. Standardized Crisis Prevention and Intervention: Establish clear, efficient, and operable processes for crisis identification, early warning, reporting, assessment, intervention, referral, supervision, and post-incident follow-up; form a professional crisis intervention team; build a solid green channel with specialized mental health medical institutions. Development-Oriented Potential Stimulation and Positive Trait Cultivation: Design and implement programs and activities aimed at enhancing positive psychological traits, including psychological resilience, emotion management, interpersonal communication, stress management, gratitude education, and life education.

Creating Characteristics: Brand-Led Guidance and Deepening the Value of Integrated Education. Creating Characteristics through Disciplinary and Cultural Integration: Closely align with the school's disciplinary advantages, historical traditions, and regional cultural characteristics, deeply explore the psychological education resources contained within them (such as the spirit of scientists, industry traits, and positive elements in regional culture), and develop school-based characteristic psychological education programs and curriculum modules. Systematic Construction of Brand Activities: Carefully develop brand psychological activity programs that run throughout the year and cover different student groups (such as the Psychological Culture Festival, Growth Training Camp, Thematic Debate Competition, Art Therapy Workshop, etc.), forming an influential matrix of education brands. Innovative Carriers for Multi-Education Integration: Actively explore the in-depth integration of psychological education with Ideological and Political Education (e.g., combining the cultivation of ideals and beliefs with the development of a positive mindset); deepen the collaborative education model with physical education (stress relief through sports, teamwork), aesthetic education (artistic expression, aesthetic healing), and labor education (character refinement through practice, value realization); use artistic forms such as psychological melodramas, microfilms, music, and painting to enhance the educational appeal. Mutual Promotion between Theoretical Research and Practice: Encourage theoretical research on mental health education based on school-based practice, feed research results back into practical innovation, and form a distinctive system of theories and methods for psychological education.

4. Conclusions and Prospects: Value and Deepening Directions of the Model

The "Five Interlocking Rings" education model for college students' mental health, with its theoretical characteristics of systematicness, coordination, and developmental nature, provides a clear theoretical framework and practical path for building a comprehensive mental health education pattern in colleges and universities in the New Era. Through the organic linkage and closed-loop operation of five components—system guarantee (establishing mechanisms), team support (strengthening teams), carrier bearing (building platforms), service deepening (prioritizing services), and characteristic-driven development (creating characteristics)—this model effectively promotes the integrated optimization of education resources, extensive participation of education subjects, full-process coverage of the education process, all-dimensional expansion of education spaces, and precise improvement of education effectiveness. Ultimately, it aims at the cultivation of students' positive psychological traits and the shaping of their sound personalities.

Looking ahead, continuous exploration for the theoretical deepening and practical promotion of this model can be conducted in the following directions: Resilience and Intelligent Upgrading of Mechanisms: Further study how to enhance the adaptability and risk resistance (resilience) of collaborative mechanisms; explore the use of big data, artificial intelligence, and other technologies to improve the intelligent level of dynamic psychological state assessment, precise risk early warning, and intelligent resource matching. Professional Depth and Collaborative Effectiveness of Teams: Deepen research on how to enhance the in-depth participation and effective collaboration of non-professional teams (such as mentors and counselors) in psychological education; explore more effective hierarchical and classified training models and inter-professional collaborative supervision mechanisms. Precise Service Supply and Effect Evaluation: Strengthen refined research on students' mental health needs to promote the personalization and precision of service supply; develop more scientific, diversified, and dynamic psychological education effect evaluation tools and indicator systems. Theoretical Construction of Characteristic Integrated Education: In-depth explore the internal mechanisms and practical paradigms of the integration of psychological education with disciplinary characteristics, regional culture, and multi-education (physical, aesthetic, and labor education), and form an integrated education theory with stronger explanatory power and guiding significance. Cross-Cultural Perspective and Universality Verification: Against the background of globalization, pay attention to the impact of cultural differences on mental health education models, verify the adaptability and effectiveness of the "Five Interlocking Rings" model in different types of colleges and universities and under different cultural backgrounds, and promote it to become a theoretical model and practical paradigm with broad reference value.

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