

A Study on the Path to Improving the Effectiveness of College Counselors' counseling conversation from the Perspective of Nonviolent Communication

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Abstract

Counseling conversation is an important working method for college counselors to carry out ideological and political education and daily student management, directly affecting students' growth and the fulfillment of the university's fundamental task of fostering virtue. However, at the practical level, counselors' counseling conversation currently suffer from problems such as arbitrary processes, teacher-student opposition, monotonous forms, and poor feedback effects. Nonviolent communication, as a communication model emphasizing empathy and authentic expression, provides a new theoretical perspective and practical tool to address these dilemmas through its four-element framework of "observation, feeling, need, request." Based on a systematic analysis of the practical dilemmas of counselors' counseling conversation, this paper introduces nonviolent communication theory into the practice of counseling conversation and proposes an operational path based on the four elements of nonviolent communication, aiming to provide a reference for improving the professional competence and educational effectiveness of college counselors' counseling conversation.

Keywords

Nonviolent communication; college counselors; counseling conversation; effectiveness; path.

1. Introduction

counseling conversation is the primary method for college counselors to understand, manage, and serve students, and it is also an important way to bridge the "last mile" of ideological and political education. In daily work, counselors rely on counseling conversation to mediate disputes, provide psychological guidance, and survey students' ideological dynamics. In recent years, academic attention to counselors' counseling conversation has been growing, with theories such as solution-focused brief therapy and narrative therapy being introduced, providing diverse theoretical resources for counseling conversation [1]. However, a consistent finding is that despite the high level of attention, the effectiveness of counselors' counseling conversation remains unsatisfactory. Chronic problems such as arbitrary processes, monolithic forms, persistent teacher-student opposition, and unsustainable effects have long troubled frontline counselors [3]. This indicates that sporadic technical implants or institutional emphasis alone cannot address the core dilemmas of counseling conversation.

Where exactly does the problem lie? This suggests that we may need to return to a more fundamental level—the structural issues of communication itself. Counselors' counseling conversation are not simple exchanges of facts but deep interpersonal interactions. When counselors habitually assume an authoritative posture to deliver judgments and instructions, or when students choose to avoid or remain silent due to defensive psychology, the

conversation deviates from effective communication from the very start [2]. This paper attempts to incorporate nonviolent communication into the practical system of counselors' counseling conversation, demonstrate its applicability at the theoretical level, and propose actionable improvement paths, offering practical references for frontline counselors.

2. Practical Dilemmas of Counselors' counseling conversation

Based on current research and practical feedback, counselors' counseling conversation generally suffer from the following prominent problems.

2.1. Arbitrary Process and Inadequate Preparation

Counselors' counseling conversation often lack systematic preparation. Many talks are arranged temporarily in the gaps of routine administrative tasks, with counselors having insufficient understanding of students' background information, past performance, family conditions, etc., leading to unclear goals and lack of coherent rhythm. Research has pointed out that counselors' counseling conversation suffer from insufficient preparation, inappropriate techniques, and inflexible venues, with the root cause being an inadequate understanding of the importance of counseling conversation and a lack of professional pre-talk preparation[3].

2.2. Teacher-Student Opposition and Weakened Emotional Connection

In traditional counseling conversation, counselors often unconsciously play the role of "judge" or "preacher" while students fall into the roles of "defender" or "silent listener", creating an invisible antagonism. Meanwhile, the digital age has gradually shifted teacher-student communication online; while task-oriented conversations are efficiently completed, face-to-face communication has been lost, further weakening the emotional bond between teachers and students. When students feel that counselors are merely performing administrative tasks rather than genuinely caring about them, the effectiveness of counseling conversation is greatly diminished [3].

2.3. Monotonous Form and Preachy Content

counseling conversation often take the form of question-and-answer sessions—counselors ask, students answer—lacking genuine two-way interaction. In terms of content, they easily slide into one-way moralizing, with counselors tending to directly give conclusions and suggestions instead of guiding students to think and express autonomously. Current college counselors' counseling conversation are characterized by arbitrariness, rigidity, unidimensionality, and didacticism, lacking theoretical height and professional depth [3].

2.4. Poor Feedback and Lack of Follow-up Mechanisms

counseling conversation are often one-time events, lacking continuous follow-up and effect evaluation. After many talks, counselors do not establish systematic recording and tracking mechanisms, making it impossible to determine whether the conversation truly resolved the student's problem or to provide ongoing accompaniment and support. When students' problems are not substantively resolved, the trust foundation for the next conversation is severely compromised [3].

The commonality of the above problems is that counselors lack a communication framework that runs through the entire conversation process, combining theoretical depth and operability. This absence leads to counseling conversation often degenerating into fragmented experiential operations in practice.

3. Theoretical Framework of Nonviolent Communication and Its Applicability

3.1. Core Connotation and Elements of Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent communication was proposed by American psychologist Marshall Rosenberg in the 1960s as a communication model aimed at establishing empathy-based, authentic connections. Rosenberg pointed out that nonviolent communication can heal deep-seated inner pain, transcend the limitations of personal thinking and emotion, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in a non-hurtful way. Its core framework includes four basic elements: observation, feeling, need, and request [2].

Specifically, observation requires an objective description of facts without judgment or blame, emphasizing the distinction between "fact" and "evaluation"; feeling refers to an individual's emotional experience, encouraging clear and authentic expression of one's emotional state; need is the deep driver behind feelings, guiding both parties to focus on "what I/you really want"; request is the proposal of specific, actionable suggestions rather than vague demands or orders. These four elements form a closed loop—from "what is seen" to "what is felt" to "what is needed" to "what is hoped the other will do"—progressing layer by layer and deepening gradually, moving communication from surface to essence.

3.2. Applicability of Nonviolent Communication to Counselors' counseling conversation

Nonviolent communication is well-suited to the needs of counselors' counseling conversation for the following reasons.

First, nonviolent communication provides a clear and operable conversational framework. Counselors do not need to rely on personal experience or intuition to decide "what to say"; they can organize their language according to the logic of "observation—feeling—need—request." This moves counseling conversation from experiential to structured operation, reducing arbitrariness and enhancing professionalism and consistency [4].

Second, nonviolent communication emphasizes "non-judgmental" expression, helping to reduce students' defensive psychology. In daily communication, evaluative statements such as "You are always late" or "You are so irresponsible" easily trigger students' resistance and avoidance. Nonviolent communication requires students to autonomously choose ways to observe and describe facts, experiencing the needs behind their own emotions, thereby making communication deeper and more effective [5]. When counselors learn to replace judgmental language with descriptive language, students feel understood and accepted rather than blamed.

Third, nonviolent communication guides students from "emotional confrontation" to "needs dialogue." In conflict situations, counselors tend to fall into the habitual thinking of "mediating right and wrong." Nonviolent communication, instead, guides both parties to focus on the real needs behind emotions, creating space for win-win solutions. Research has clearly pointed out that the application of nonviolent communication in counselors' work can provide new ideas for good communication between teachers and students and for reasonably handling and resolving communication conflicts [4,5].

4. Path Construction for Improving the Effectiveness of Counselors' counseling conversation through Nonviolent Communication

Based on the four-element framework of nonviolent communication (observation, feeling, need, request) and the workflow of counselors' counseling conversation, this paper proposes a "four-step" operational path.

4.1. Step One: Observation—Shifting from Subjective Judgment to Objective Description

The first step of counseling conversation is to help students move away from subjective judgments and learn to describe facts objectively. Many students habitually use evaluative expressions such as "He is targeting me" or "She is deliberately disturbing me" when expressing distress. The counselor's task is to guide students to transform abstract judgments into concrete, verifiable factual descriptions. For example, when a student says, "He is always targeting me," the counselor might ask, "Can you tell me what specifically happened that made you feel this way?" [5]

In practice, using objective language to express one's understanding of a problem and allowing students to autonomously choose how to observe and describe facts are important prerequisites for effective communication [4]. The core logic of this step is to first "anchor" the problem at the factual level, preventing the conversation from spiraling into emotional catharsis. At the same time, counselors should lead by example, using "I observe that..." rather than "I feel that you..." to initiate the conversation.

4.2. Step Two: Feeling—Shifting from Emotional Release to Emotional Naming

Once the facts are clarified, the conversation naturally moves to the feeling level. Many students only know that they are "angry" or "upset" in conflicts, unable to distinguish whether behind the anger lies shame, disappointment, or neglect. The counselor's task at this stage is to help students identify and name emotions, completing the transformation from "emotional release" to "emotional identification." For example, when a student says, "I am very angry," the counselor might guide: "Can you tell me what specific things made you angry? Among those things, what bothered you the most?"

When applying the second element of nonviolent communication, "feeling," counselors should honestly and clearly express their own feelings while also listening to and empathizing with the other's feelings [2]. The goal of this stage is to make students feel that their emotions are seen and accepted. When students find that their anger, frustration, or anxiety receives empathic responses from the counselor, psychological defenses gradually lower, and the conversation shifts from confrontation to cooperation.

4.3. Step Three: Need—Shifting from Blaming Others to Expressing Inner Needs

The expression of feelings ultimately returns to the identification of inner needs. A core assumption of nonviolent communication is that behind every emotion lies an unmet need. When students' needs are seen and understood, solutions often become self-evident. The "need" element of nonviolent communication is precisely about helping students learn to identify and express their genuine needs [4].

At this stage, counselors can guide students through questions such as: "What do you really need?" "What do you hope for most in this situation?" For example, a student who is upset due to a dormitory schedule conflict might, upon probing, discover that what he truly needs is not an apology from the other party but regular sleep assurance and respect for his living habits.

4.4. Step Four: Request—Shifting from Vague Complaints to Concrete Negotiation

Once needs are identified, the conversation naturally enters the request stage. The request is the final component of nonviolent communication and a key link in transforming conversational outcomes into practical changes. Counselors should guide students to make specific, actionable, and positively framed requests. Counselors themselves can also propose concrete action requests, allowing students to express their needs through requests [5].

It is important to emphasize that there is an essential difference between "request" and "demand." The former leaves room for refusal and negotiation, while the latter is a one-way command. In counseling conversation, counselors should help students develop a sense of "request," i.e., clearly expressing what they hope the other will do rather than complaining about what the other should not do. At the same time, counselors themselves should learn to make reasonable requests of students rather than issuing orders from an authoritative posture.

4.5. From the Four-Step Method to a Systematic Process

The above four steps are not linearly segmented but are interpenetrating and iteratively progressive. Counselors can flexibly invoke them according to the specific context in practice. For instance, when a student is highly emotionally agitated, they might start with feelings; when a student is trapped in abstract judgments, they might start with observation. Furthermore, counselors should embed the concept of nonviolent communication throughout the entire counseling process—from pre-talk preparation (collecting background information, clarifying conversation goals), to in-talk guidance (following the four-element structure), to post-talk follow-up (recording key points, continuous attention)—forming a complete working loop [3]. In this process, nonviolent communication provides not merely technical tools but a deeper educational philosophy: believing that every student has the intrinsic motivation and ability for self-growth, and that the counselor's role is not to solve problems for students but to accompany them in finding their own ways to solve problems.

5. Conclusion

counseling conversation is a core competency for college counselors to fulfill their job responsibilities and implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue. From the theoretical perspective of nonviolent communication, this paper systematically analyzed the practical dilemmas of counselors' counseling conversation, demonstrated the applicability of nonviolent communication to such talks, and constructed a practical path based on the four elements of "observation, feeling, need, request." Nonviolent communication provides a communication framework that combines theoretical depth and operability, helping counselors move from experience-driven to profession-driven practice, from one-way moralizing to two-way dialogue, and from transaction-oriented handling to deep education.

It is worth noting that nonviolent communication is not merely a communication technique but also an educational philosophy. It requires counselors to set aside authoritative postures and face every student with equality, respect, and empathy. When counselors truly internalize nonviolent communication as their daily working mindset, counseling conversation will no longer be trivial "firefighting tasks" but become an important field for connecting the hearts of teachers and students and nourishing student growth. Future research could further explore the integrated application of nonviolent communication with other psychological intervention methods, as well as differentiated communication strategies for different types of student groups, to promote the continuous optimization and professional upgrading of counselors' counseling conversation work.

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