

Practical Strategies for Integrating Psychological Education into the Ideological and Political Work of College Counselors

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Abstract: Mental health education and ideological and political education share highly aligned educational objectives. The fundamental mission of ideological and political education is to cultivate virtue and nurture talents; meanwhile, a healthy psychological state serves as the psychological foundation upon which students can engage with ideological and political education and develop a correct worldview, outlook on life, and set of values. A student deeply troubled by psychological issues finds it difficult to participate in the process of ideological and political education effectively or to internalize the value concepts conveyed through such education. The “Guiding Outline for Mental Health Education for Students in Higher Education Institutions” explicitly states the need to “promote the coordinated development of students’ mental health literacy, ideological and moral quality, and scientific and cultural literacy.” This statement clearly illustrates the inseparable intrinsic relationship between nurturing the mind and cultivating morality: psychological quality provides the soil in which moral quality can grow and be consolidated, while moral quality offers the value direction and meaning support necessary for psychological quality.

Keywords: University counselors; Psychological education; Ideological and political work

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1. Introduction

In the new era, higher education institutions have explicitly proposed the “Three-Comprehensive Education” comprehensive reform initiative; psychological education, as a vital component of the “Ten Major Education Systems,” shares the same origins and direction as ideological and political education, while complementing and coexisting with it. Deeply integrating psychological education into the ideological and political work of student counselors—thereby breaking through the traditional barrier in ideological and political education that emphasizes theoretical indoctrination at the expense of psychological counseling, and achieving an organic integration of ideological guidance with psychological empowerment—is the core pathway

for fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, addressing the ideological and psychological challenges faced by contemporary university students, and enhancing the effectiveness of ideological and political education in higher education institutions. Based on this premise and in alignment with the practical realities of student affairs in higher education institutions, exploring scientific pathways and practical strategies for integrating psychological education into the ideological and political work of student counselors holds significant practical importance for constructing a comprehensive and multi-dimensional educational system in higher education.

2. The value of integrating psychological education with the ideological and political work of university counselors

Psychological education and ideological and political education are not mutually exclusive; rather, they constitute an organic whole that can be integrated and complement each other. They align closely in terms of their objectives, target groups, and contextual settings, with their integration grounded in intrinsic logic; clarifying this integration logic is a prerequisite for counselors to implement integrated student development^[1]. Regarding educational objectives, the two approaches share the same direction: ideological and political education aims at value guidance, establishment of beliefs, cultivation of moral character, and refinement of personality; whereas psychological education targets positive mental states, adaptive coping skills, emotional resilience, and healthy mental well-being, addressing psychological crises through preventive measures. The former addresses issues related to ideological orientation and stance, while the latter tackles issues concerning mental state and personal growth—collectively forming the foundation for the holistic development of college students. In terms of target audiences, both approaches resonate well with the developmental characteristics of contemporary university students: although today's students possess agile thinking, they often exhibit poor stress tolerance and weak emotional regulation, with their value judgments being prone to fluctuation; consequently, the problems they encounter frequently involve both ideological and psychological dimensions. If psychological discomfort remains unaddressed, it may undermine their values or trigger academic aversion; conversely, ideological deviations can exacerbate psychological imbalance. Therefore, counselors should move beyond a simplistic dichotomous approach, leveraging psychological education to reinforce ideological and political education, and utilizing ideological influence to provide warmth to psychological well-being. Regarding work contexts, the scope covered by both approaches is comprehensive; the responsibilities of counselors span the entire four-year period from enrollment through graduation, with the situations encountered precisely aligning with the routine practices of psychological education. Integrating psychological education into the daily routines of ideological and political education can circumvent the limitations inherent in purely lecture-based approaches, thereby achieving immersive educational experiences, emotionally resonant ideological discourse, and effective psychological intervention.

3. The current practical challenges in integrating psychological education into counselors' ideological and political work

3.1. There exists a fragmented and biased approach to educational cognition

Currently, some university counselors exhibit significant cognitive biases regarding their educational responsibilities, separating ideological and political education from psychological education and treating

them according to fixed patterns. Some counselors adopt a narrow perspective on the distinction between these two types of education, positioning ideological and political education solely as encompassing ideological guidance, disciplinary requirements, and moral cultivation^[2]; they view it as a routine, mandatory task, while simultaneously treating psychological education as a specialized service handled by the psychological counseling center, erroneously isolating it from general students (i.e., those without special psychological conditions) and mistakenly believing that it is unrelated to conventional ideological and political work. Additionally, there exists a tendency to prioritize ideological and political education over psychological education: when students experience low mood, academic burnout, or interpersonal difficulties, some counselors often fail to conduct thorough analyses but instead simplify the causes to ideological or disciplinary issues, responding with criticism, admonishment, or theoretical indoctrination, while failing to give sufficient attention to the psychological factors themselves. This approach results in superficial and incomplete educational outcomes, which in turn exacerbate the teacher-student relationship and make it more difficult to resolve the ensuing challenges.

3.2. Practical skills exhibit gaps in specialization

Psychological education is a highly specialized profession that requires practitioners to possess fundamental knowledge of psychology, psychological identification skills, emotional counseling techniques, and crisis intervention capabilities. Currently, most university counselors come from academic backgrounds such as ideological and political education, humanities, or science and engineering, yet they often lack systematic training in psychology or mental health education^[3], resulting in significant gaps in their professional competencies. On one hand, counselors may lack sufficient psychological identification skills, making it difficult for them to distinguish between normal emotional fluctuations and abnormal psychological issues, thereby easily falling into situations where they “overinterpret minor issues” or “ignore problems altogether, delaying timely intervention”; on the other hand, they may be deficient in counseling techniques—when confronted with students’ psychological concerns, they may rely solely on personal experience to offer simple comfort, rather than employing professional psychological methods to provide precise guidance, thus struggling to address students’ deeper psychological issues. Additionally, some counselors themselves may have inadequate resilience against psychological stress; after prolonged engagement with students’ negative issues, they are prone to developing occupational burnout, which undermines the stability of their educational mission.

3.3. The work methodology suffers from a lack of practicality

An examination of the current models employed by universities for educational purposes reveals that the integration of ideological and political education with psychological education has largely not been fully realized, lacking a systematic and routine approach to practical implementation. In general educational practices, ideological and political class meetings or Youth League Day activities in universities primarily focus on lecturing on policies, analyzing theories, and emphasizing discipline; however, content related to psychological knowledge—such as the dissemination of psychological concepts, emotional regulation, and stress management—is largely absent from these activities. Furthermore, mental health education itself often relies on traditional methods—such as lectures, posters, and assessment tools—and lacks a fundamental core of ideological and value-guiding elements. The deep integration of the two educational systems—

psychological education and ideological and political education—is by no means a mechanical combination or simple superposition of the two models; it cannot involve the rigid embedding of the psychological education system into the daily work of ideological and political education, nor can it rely solely on a single ideological and political value system to completely dominate or dilute the independent function and professional nature of psychological education^[4]. Currently, counselors' concern for psychological issues primarily focuses on key students identified through comprehensive surveys; meanwhile, a robust continuous psychological support mechanism for the vast majority of ordinary students remains underdeveloped, making it difficult to achieve holistic and lifelong educational support for all students.

4. Strategies for integrating psychological education into the practical implementation of ideological and political work conducted by university counselors

4.1. Integrating into daily management to establish a sustained, immersive educational model

Daily ideological and political education constitutes a fundamental platform for counselors' educational efforts and serves as the primary arena where psychological education can exert its influence. By implementing routine practices, we should refine and solidify the approach to psychological education to achieve subtle yet profound effects. First, heart-to-heart conversations should be integrated into the optimized framework of ideological communication and psychological counseling; such conversations represent a fundamental form of ideological and political engagement employed by counselors, which traditionally often relied on preaching or disciplinary reminders^[5]; therefore, these interactions should incorporate elements of psychological listening and emotional empathy. These conversations should follow a logical sequence of “empathy – listening – guidance”: rather than hastily dismissing emotions, one should analyze their underlying causes and then provide value-based guidance from an ideological and political perspective. When addressing issues such as first-year students' adjustment period, academic obstacles, interpersonal conflicts, failure in courses leading to disinterest in learning, or graduation anxiety, standardized conversation outlines can be designed to integrate psychological assessment, counseling language, and ideological guidance, thereby ensuring that these conversations are both warm and substantive. Additionally, a record-keeping system for heart-to-heart conversations should be established, dynamically documenting the timing, context, and specific challenges encountered during these sessions to facilitate long-term observation and timely support. Second, psychological education should be incorporated into class-level ideological and political development initiatives; when conducting ideological and political work at the dormitory or class level, emphasis should be placed on the role of positive psychological qualities in fostering a healthy class atmosphere and dormitory environment. Class management should not rely solely on institutional rules or numerical data; instead, it should cultivate an inclusive and collaborative atmosphere, utilizing group interactions, team-building activities, and peer support to alleviate feelings of loneliness and anxiety, while nurturing a sense of belonging and collaborative habits. In dormitory ideological and political education, efforts should focus on addressing two types of issues: interpersonal relationships and negative atmospheres. Regular micro-salons should be organized to train students in communication skills and teach them methods for emotional regulation, thereby resolving conflicts at their nascent stage and fostering a healthy environment. Simultaneously, psychological monitoring points should be established through the

involvement of class representatives, psychological counselors, and dormitory leaders^[6], enabling continuous tracking of psychological dynamics to achieve the goals of early detection, early alerting, and early guidance. Thirdly, daily support initiatives should serve as a dual catalyst for both psychological and ideological development; for students facing financial difficulties, academic challenges, or special family circumstances, in addition to providing material, academic, and policy-based support, emphasis should be placed on offering psychological assistance. Such students are prone to falling into states of inferiority, self-denial, or high stress; therefore, it is essential to avoid labeling them, instead promoting their growth through consistent care, affirming dialogue, and value-based guidance—thereby transforming external support into internal empowerment, thereby achieving multiple educational outcomes such as problem-solving, overcoming adversity, and even reconstructing cognitive frameworks.

4.2. Integrating thematic education to create an immersive integrated educational classroom

Thematic class meetings, Youth League Day activities, and ideological and political education courses serve as fundamental vehicles for systematic ideological and political education, as well as platforms upon which large-scale psychological education can be implemented; appropriate optimization of both content and format facilitates the integration of ideological and political value guidance with the cultivation of psychological qualities. From a content perspective, it is necessary to rethink the thematic education framework—avoiding a stark separation between ideological and political education and psychological themes, but instead seeking ways to integrate the two. This can be achieved by combining ideals and beliefs with career planning to help individuals identify their suitable direction and reduce anxiety; by linking patriotism and collective consciousness with responsibility, gratitude, and perseverance^[7], thereby stimulating selfless psychological traits; by utilizing discipline and ethics to govern emotional regulation and behavioral habits, thereby fostering a more complete personality; and by providing stress management and setback analysis regarding graduation or employment, teaching individuals how to face competition rationally without succumbing to anxiety. Centered around growth topics such as adaptation, academics, interpersonal relationships, emotions, career development, and coping with setbacks, one or two integrated class meetings should be held monthly, transforming ideological learning into a resource for spiritual nourishment and a catalyst for psychological growth. Simultaneously, new formats should be employed to enhance effectiveness—moving beyond mere theoretical lecturing and instead utilizing scenarios, case studies, group activities, sharing sessions, and even psychological games to create an immersive experience^[8]. Communication-based group counseling should be designed specifically for addressing interpersonal conflicts, using moral standards to guide individuals in learning how to respect, accept, and communicate effectively. Through these immersive approaches, the affinity of ideological and political education and the practical significance of psychological education can be enhanced, truly achieving the ultimate goal of holistic education.

4.3. Focus on key groups to implement targeted, stratified educational support

For university counselors, it is essential to approach student development through tiered, categorized, and targeted approaches—integrating diversity with inclusivity while avoiding homogeneous, conventional practices. For incoming first-year students, student development should prioritize adaptation to campus life; the various challenges they encounter during their initial period—such as environmental, interpersonal, and academic difficulties—can easily lead to psychological confusion or depression, as well as negative states

such as loneliness or low mood, or even a lack of focus. In such cases, counselors should utilize university regulations and ideological education resources to guide students toward adaptation, and employ methods such as group psychological training, introductions from upper-level students, and class collaboration to facilitate this transition, enabling first-year students to quickly establish a sense of belonging, learn self-discipline, and set growth goals that align with their current stage of development. When conducting educational work with mid-to-high-level students, counselors should address both academic and psychological aspects; at this stage, academic difficulties, competitive exam pressures, or emotional issues may push these students into states of restlessness, doubt, or utilitarianism. Counselors should take the academic atmosphere as a starting point, incorporating guidance on stress management, time management, and emotional regulation into their psychological support efforts, integrating value orientation and the concept of perseverance into the educational process, and striving to ensure that learning remains neither superficial nor aimless—thereby encouraging students to pursue knowledge diligently without seeking quick results, so that academic progress and personal growth occur in tandem and mutually reinforce one another. When conducting educational work with graduating students, counselors should consider factors related to further education, employment prospects, and their psychological state; at this stage, graduates face intense competition and numerous challenges associated with graduation and parting ways, which can easily lead them to develop thoughts of “lying flat” or self-negation, or exhibit deviations such as excessive utilitarianism, fear of difficulty, or a lack of responsibility. Counselors should integrate career guidance and coping strategies for setbacks into graduation ideological and political education as well as employment orientation programs; they should employ rational approaches to analyze competitive gains and losses, leverage a sense of national identity to inspire a spirit of responsibility, and teach students how to think systematically about personal growth and success—thereby alleviating graduation anxiety and fostering a proactive attitude. Additionally, for students who exhibit psychological warning signs, the university can utilize psychological screening surveys and routine observational data to identify these individuals^[9], conduct detailed analyses of both the individual and the specific circumstances, and establish a personalized support system tailored to each case. Counselors and psychology instructors should collaborate to identify the root causes of the student’s issues, design appropriate intervention methods, use psychological counseling to alleviate negative emotions, employ ideological and political work to clarify value judgments, integrate families, schools, and student organizations into a comprehensive support network, assess the student’s progress at various stages, and strive to facilitate a shift in their mindset, improvement in their behavior, and a more accurate understanding of reality.

4.4. Strengthening self-enabling capabilities and solidifying the professional foundation for integrated education

The specialized development of counselors’ professional competencies is pivotal to the effective implementation of integrated education. To closely integrate psychological education with ideological and political education, it is essential to continuously strengthen the comprehensive professional training of counselors and solidify the foundation of educational practices in higher education institutions in the new era. From a knowledge perspective, efforts should be made to establish a bidirectional professional knowledge system—encompassing systematic follow-up learning on various topics related to mental health within the university, professional psychological supervision, and real-world case studies—while incorporating

fundamental principles of psychology, psychological characteristics of young adults, psychological crisis management, and group psychological techniques into the scope of professional research; this enables counselors to assess the psychological state of college students accurately, provide rational guidance, or implement standardized interventions^[10], thereby addressing their gaps in mental health education through a systematic approach. Simultaneously, counselors should focus on the field of ideological and political education, prioritizing ideological guidance and value cultivation, and using a correct political stance to guide the entire process of psychological education. From a competency perspective, counselors should strive to enhance their practical and reflective analysis skills, utilizing the points where ideological and political education intersect with psychological support in their daily student work as case studies; they should conduct regular summarization and analysis of key aspects such as heart-to-heart conversations, thematic ideological and political activities, individual growth counseling, and psychological crisis intervention, systematically summarize their experiences, identify shortcomings or gaps, and gradually explore standardized operational methods that are tailored to their specific roles and align with the developmental needs of students; furthermore, they should proactively exchange experiences with peers or adopt best practices from other universities, incorporate exemplary educational approaches into their consideration, and pursue continuous innovation and exploration in integrated education. Furthermore, counselors must not overlook personal psychological well-being and state management; they should approach any stress or feelings of burnout encountered in their professional work rationally, maintain effective control over their emotions and proactively adjust their mindset, face their educational responsibilities with a stable and enthusiastic attitude, and leverage their strong psychological resilience and standardized professional conduct to guide students toward positive growth.

5. Conclusion

The deep integration of psychological education with the ideological and political education work conducted by university counselors represents an inevitable trend for higher education institutions in the new era to fulfill their fundamental mission of fostering virtue through education, innovate ideological and political education models, and enhance the overall quality of student development. Currently, educational efforts in universities have transitioned from a singular approach of ideological preaching to a new phase characterized by the synergistic application of ideological guidance and psychological empowerment. As frontline educators, counselors must proactively transform their educational mindset, break down traditional operational barriers, and, based on the patterns of student growth and the realities of educational practice, fully integrate the concepts, methods, and techniques of psychological education into all aspects of daily management, thematic education, targeted support, and crisis response. Through routine, meticulous, and professional integrated educational practices, this approach not only addresses cognitive biases and value dilemmas at the ideological level of students but also resolves emotional distress and growth challenges at the psychological level, thereby cultivating students' sound personalities, healthy mindsets, and firm convictions—thereby truly achieving the goals of nurturing both character and mind, fostering moral integrity and holistic development, and laying a solid foundation for the high-quality advancement of ideological and political education in higher education institutions during the new era.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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