

Construction of a Mental Health Course Teaching Model from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

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Abstract: Traditional mental health courses, which are based on the pathological psychology model and focus on problem prevention and intervention, have limitations in promoting students' psychological flourishing and potential development. Positive psychology expands the connotation of mental health to include the realization of positive psychological functioning, thereby providing a critical perspective for the reform of the course model. This study aims to construct a systematic teaching model oriented toward positive psychology, covering theoretical reconstruction, element design, and evaluation system. At the theoretical level, it redefines the connotation of mental health, establishes the cultivation of positive psychological qualities as the goal, and achieves a deep integration of core theories with teaching logic. In terms of element design, it builds a strength-oriented content system, integrates experiential immersion and interactive generative teaching methods, and creates a supportive classroom psychological environment. As for the evaluation system, it establishes multidimensional developmental indicators, comprehensively employs process-oriented and performance-based assessments, and forms an empowering feedback mechanism for development. This model seeks to promote the transformation of mental health education from a remedial paradigm to a developmental paradigm, thereby providing a pedagogical basis for systematically cultivating learners' positive qualities and enhancing their overall well-being.

Keywords: Positive Psychology; Mental Health Course; Teaching Model; Cultivation of Psychological Qualities; Experiential Learning; Developmental Evaluation

Introduction

The foundational role of mental health education in promoting students' holistic development has become a consensus. However, because traditional course models are rooted in the pathological paradigm, their objectives, content, and methods often focus on the identification and management of psychological problems, thus showing significant inadequacy in actively constructing positive psychological states and systematically developing individual potential. This orientation, which emphasizes “deficit reduction” rather than “capacity enhancement,” fails to adequately respond to individuals' universal pursuit of life meaning, well-being experiences, and excellent functioning. Therefore, introducing the perspective of positive psychology and systematically reconstructing the existing course model is not only theoretically necessary but also a critical pathway to improving the effectiveness and contemporary relevance of mental health education. The scientific findings of positive psychology regarding human strengths, happiness, and flourishing provide a solid theoretical foundation and rich practical insights for transforming mental health courses from a discipline about “problems” into a discipline about “growth” and “development.” The significance of this study lies in its construction of a complete teaching model that covers theoretical foundations, instructional elements, and evaluation systems, thereby clarifying the specific dimensions and operational logic for achieving a paradigm shift in mental health courses, and consequently providing a coherent, scientific, and referable professional framework for course design and implementation.

1. Theoretical Reconstruction of Mental Health Courses from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

1.1 Positive Psychology's Expanded Definition of the Connotation of Mental Health

Traditional concepts of mental health focus on the prevention of mental illness and the reduction of

symptoms, and their conceptual framework is built upon a pathological model that emphasizes the defects and problems of individuals deviating from normal functioning. This paradigm defines mental health mainly as a state of being “free from illness,” and its intervention logic naturally leads to the identification and correction of negative psychological experiences. The rise of positive psychology constitutes an important theoretical supplement and expansion to this view, as it proposes that mental health does not merely mean the absence of suffering or disorders but is more essentially reflected in the vigorous development and realization of an individual's positive psychological functioning. This perspective incorporates subjective well-being, a sense of meaning in life, positive interpersonal relationships, and the identification and application of personal strengths into the core categories of mental health, thereby constructing a continuous spectrum ranging from the elimination of suffering to the pursuit of flourishing[1].

Based on this expanded definition, the concept of mental health transcends static balance or adaptation and is instead understood as a dynamic, developable state of positive experience and functional operation. It emphasizes the activation of an individual's intrinsic potential and constructive strengths, and it focuses on how to promote psychological growth, enhance the quality of life, and achieve optimal functioning. Within this framework, the fundamental task of mental health courses is no longer limited to constructing an “immune system” against psychological problems; instead, it requires the further design of growth pathways that systematically cultivate positive experiences, shape adaptive cognitive and emotional patterns, and help individuals realize their self-worth. This theoretical reconstruction provides the primary academic basis for the transformation of mental health courses from a remedial model to a developmental and cultivational model.

1.2 Goal Orientation of the Course Centered on the Cultivation of Psychological Qualities

Guided by this expanded connotation, the goal setting of mental health courses must undergo a profound shift, moving from a focus on problem alleviation and crisis response to a core orientation of systematically cultivating positive psychological qualities. Previous course objectives often implied a linear “problem- solution” logic, in which the organization of teaching content and the design of instructional activities both served to help students identify risks and master coping skills. With the cultivation of positive psychological qualities as the goal, however, the course system is required to directly target malleable positive traits such as self- determination, optimism, resilience, gratitude, concentration (flow), and interpersonal and emotional competence, aiming to equip students with ample psychological development capital through the educational process.

This goal shift means that the value orientation of the course changes from “avoiding failure” to “promoting success,” and extends from focusing on “how to cope with life's adversities” to “how to construct a fulfilling life.” The course design must systematically answer which positive psychological qualities are crucial for the holistic development of contemporary learners, what intrinsic relationships and developmental sequences exist among these qualities, and through what educational mechanisms their internalization and transfer can be effectively facilitated. The specification of goals will directly drive the evolution of course content from knowledge transmission to experience generation and quality cultivation, requiring the teaching model to create learning situations that continuously stimulate positive emotions, engagement, meaning, and a sense of accomplishment, so that students not only understand health cognitively but also experience and develop it emotionally and behaviorally.

1.3 The Integration Path of Core Theories of Positive Psychology and Teaching Logic

Achieving an effective shift in course goals depends on creatively transforming the core theoretical propositions of positive psychology into the internal logic that guides teaching practice. This means that teaching logic must go beyond general educational principles and deeply integrate specific findings from positive psychology regarding human strengths and well-being. For example, Seligman's PERMA theoretical framework provides key dimensional guidance for course design, and teaching logic should consider how to systematically incorporate learning segments that elicit positive emotions, promote deep engagement, cultivate positive relationships, create a sense of meaning, and encourage the experience of achievement. The strengths theory, in turn, requires teaching logic to follow the thread of “discovering- using- cultivating” individual strengths, rather than focusing solely on remedying deficiencies[2].

The integration path of teaching logic needs to further consider the synergistic effects among theories and the pedagogical sequence. Starting with the cultivation of a growth mindset can lay a cognitive foundation for accepting challenges and learning from setbacks. On this basis, the introduction of elements from optimistic explanatory style and hope theory helps shape positive motivation oriented toward the future. Meanwhile, the design of gratitude exercises and acts of kindness can strengthen social connection and a sense of meaning. This integration is not a simple listing of theories; instead, it constructs an organic framework for teaching actions that takes the promotion of learners' subjective psychological growth as its axis, with each theoretical element supporting one another in a progressive manner. It requires that teaching activities themselves become the vehicle for positive psychological experiences, allowing the learning process to naturally become a process of generating and developing positive psychological qualities, thereby achieving an internal unity between the concepts of positive psychology and the practice of mental health education at the operational level.

2. Design of Teaching Model Elements for Mental Health Courses Based on Positive Psychology

2.1 Construction of a Strength-Oriented and Growth-Oriented Content System

The content organization of traditional mental health courses often revolves around “problem domains,” such as stress management, identification of emotional distress, or coping with interpersonal conflicts, and their internal logic focuses on intervening in potential or existing psychological challenges. The positive psychology perspective requires the construction of a fundamentally different content system, whose core logic shifts from “problem repair” to “strength cultivation.” This system takes the identification, development, and application of individuals' intrinsic strengths and virtues as its starting point, and it anchors content modules in the explanation and experience of character strengths such as curiosity, love of learning, insight, bravery, kindness, and justice. The criterion for content selection lies not in its relevance to psychological problems but in its contribution to promoting individual flourishing and life engagement.

The construction of a growth-oriented content system emphasizes the dynamic nature and developmental sequence of the content. It is not a collection of fixed knowledge points but rather an open framework that guides students in continuous self-exploration and positive construction. The content modules present a spiraling and interrelated progression; for example, the design moves from the cognition and experience of positive emotions, to the use of strengths to create flow experiences, then to the cultivation of psychological resilience by applying strengths in adversity, and finally to the exploration of life meaning and purpose. This system aims to transform the core research areas of positive psychology — such as the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, flow experiences, interpersonal relationships, meaning, and achievement — into interconnected and progressively deepening learning themes, thereby making the course content itself a continuous source of nourishment for students' positive psychological development[3].

2.2 Integration of Teaching Methods with Experiential Immersion and Interactive Generation

The traditional lecture method, which is dominated by knowledge transmission, struggles to achieve the deep teaching goal of internalizing positive psychological qualities. The teaching model based on positive psychology emphasizes that teaching methods must serve to create direct positive experiences and to promote the generation of meaning from those experiences through interaction. Therefore, the teaching methods need to integrate the dual characteristics of experiential immersion and interactive generation. Experiential immersion refers to the use of carefully designed structured activities, such as strengths assessment feedback, mindfulness meditation exercises, gratitude visits, acts of kindness practice, or goal visualization training, to guide students into deep engagement and direct perception of target psychological states or behavioral patterns. These activities constitute the raw material for students' positive cognitive and emotional processing.

Interactive generation refers to the transformation of personal experience into deepened understanding and solidified dispositions through dialogue, sharing, collaboration, and reflection within a learning community. For example, small-group discussions centered on personal strengths stories, narrative sharing of successful experiences in coping with challenges, or the collaborative design and implementation of a micro-project aimed at enhancing class well-being can all catalyze the diversification of perspectives, emotional resonance, and the negotiation of meaning through

interaction. This integrated teaching method follows the cycle of “experience- share- reflect- integrate,” and its essence is the concretization of constructivist learning theory in the field of cultivating positive psychological qualities. It makes the learning process a socialized meaning-making process, in which students serve both as experiencers of their own positive experiences and as witnesses and facilitators of their peers' positive development.

2.3 Principles for Creating a Supportive Classroom Psychological Environment

The effectiveness of a teaching model ultimately resides in the immediate context in which it operates; therefore, constructing a supportive classroom psychological environment that is highly consistent with the goals of positive psychology is a key element of the model design. This environment goes beyond the arrangement of physical space and points to a micro-social system with a specific psychological atmosphere co-created by teachers and students. The primary principle for its creation is the establishment of psychological safety and trust, in which students perceive that they will not be judged, ridiculed, or harmed when showing vulnerability, sharing personal experiences, or trying new behaviors. This sense of safety is a prerequisite for deep self-exploration and authentic interaction[4].

Second, the environment should be permeated with a culture of unconditional positive regard and growth-oriented feedback. The teacher's role shifts from that of an evaluator to an empathetic guide and a discoverer of strengths, and the teacher's feedback focuses on students' effort processes, intrinsic resources, and signs of progress, rather than only on outcomes or comparisons with norms. Classroom interaction norms should encourage appreciative inquiry, the use of strengths-based language, and solution-focused discussion. Finally, the environment itself should serve as a demonstration field for positive psychological qualities; it should embody respect, kindness, cooperation, and justice, so that students can not only learn knowledge about positive psychology but also continuously immerse themselves in and experience a supportive interpersonal relationship and a sense of community. Such a psychological environment is not merely the background of teaching activities but rather their core active ingredient, continuously providing students with the social-emotional support and behavioral permission necessary for making positive changes.

3. Construction of a Teaching Evaluation System Oriented Toward Positive Psychology

3.1 An Assessment Framework for Multidimensional Psychological Development Indicators

The primary characteristic of teaching evaluation oriented toward positive psychology lies in the shift of assessment indicators from traditional single-dimension pathological symptom screening or knowledge mastery tests to a systematic examination of an individual's multidimensional positive psychological development. This assessment framework is built upon the theoretical conception of “complete psychological functioning” in positive psychology, and its indicator dimensions need to cover multiple levels, including emotion, cognition, behavior, and social relationships. Specifically, the assessment indicators can systematically integrate multiple interrelated constructs such as subjective well-being, a sense of meaning in life, psychological resilience, the level of growth mindset, the frequency of using core strengths, relationship satisfaction, and the degree of engagement in academic work and life. Together, these indicators depict a dynamic picture of an individual's state of “being” and “becoming,” rather than merely confirming the static cross-section of “having no problems.”

Constructing such a multidimensional framework requires transforming abstract theoretical constructs into observable and traceable indicators of behavioral performance and experiential reports. For example, psychological resilience is not only assessed through self-report scales but may also be indirectly measured by analyzing students' sustained effort behaviors on challenging tasks or their cognitive restructuring narratives about frustrating events; the use of strengths can be reflected through records of behavioral choices in specific situations or the personal traits displayed in project outcomes. This framework is therefore hierarchical and integrative, including both periodic measurements of stable traits and immediate captures of dynamic processes and specific performances, aiming to comprehensively reflect the potential influence paths and effect ranges of course interventions on learners' overall psychological functioning and quality of life[5].

3.2 Comprehensive Application of Process-Oriented and Performance-Based Assessment Methods

To effectively capture the nonlinear growth and contextualized manifestations of multidimensional psychological development indicators, assessment methods must go beyond summative terminal tests and instead comprehensively employ both process-oriented and performance-based assessments. Process-oriented assessment runs throughout the entire teaching activity, and its forms include but are not limited to structured learning portfolios, continuous observation records, reflective journals, brief periodic measurements of psychological experience, and the collection of qualitative feedback during classroom interactions. This method focuses on the small changes, trial efforts, and cognitive-emotional trajectories of students during learning journeys such as strength exploration, positive emotion regulation, and meaning construction, and its value lies in revealing the dynamic process of development and individualized patterns of growth.

Performance-based assessment focuses on students' ability to apply positive psychology principles to complete tasks, solve problems, or produce outcomes in simulated or real situations. For example, students design and implement an action plan to enhance personal or group well-being, create an artistic work that expresses personal strengths or life meaning, or lead a discussion on positive reframing for coping with a specific difficulty. Such assessments place students in complex tasks that require the integrated use of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they have learned, and the focus of the evaluation shifts from “what they know” to “what they can do” and “in what state they do it.” The combination of process-oriented and performance-based assessments constitutes a three-dimensional system for collecting evidence; it not only evaluates the outcomes of learning but also integrates the assessment itself into the learning process, making assessment activities a form of learning that promotes students' self-awareness, reflection, and goal setting.

3.3 An Evaluation Feedback Mechanism Aimed at Empowering Development

The ultimate effectiveness of the evaluation system depends heavily on the design orientation of its feedback mechanism. The fundamental purpose of evaluation feedback oriented toward positive psychology is to empower students' development, rather than to grade them or diagnose their deficiencies. The core characteristic of an empowering feedback mechanism is the transformation of evaluation information into resources that enhance students' self-efficacy, autonomy, and future action competence. The content of the feedback focuses on describing the specific behavioral strengths, cognitive progress, or signs of emotional growth that students demonstrate during the development of positive psychological qualities, and it connects these to the individual's goal setting or developmental potential, rather than merely providing norm-referenced comparisons with others.

This mechanism emphasizes the dialogic and generative nature of feedback. The feedback provided by teachers aims to elicit students' self-evaluation and subsequent planning, for example, by guiding students to reflect through questions such as “What personal strengths did you primarily use while completing the task?”, “How has this experience deepened your understanding of...?”, or “Based on your current progress, what direction do you wish to explore or strengthen next?” This feedback dialogue places students in the subject position of their own development, and the evaluation information becomes a scaffold for their self-regulated learning. Furthermore, the timing and frequency of the feedback follow the principle of supportiveness, ensuring that students receive timely information that helps them continue to engage and improve when needed. Through this feedback aimed at empowering development, teaching evaluation is thoroughly integrated into a virtuous cycle that promotes students' psychological growth, becoming an indispensable driving component of the teaching model.

Conclusion

Starting from the perspective of positive psychology, this study systematically constructs a teaching model for mental health courses that covers theoretical orientation, element design, and evaluation support. This model first completes a theoretical reconstruction of the course concept, defining mental health as the dynamic development of positive functioning and establishing a developmental goal centered on cultivating positive psychological qualities. On this basis, the model designs a system of teaching elements with a strength-oriented content system, experience-generating teaching methods, and a supportive environment as its core, ensuring the internal consistency between teaching practice and the goals of positive psychology.

Finally, the model proposes a teaching evaluation system supported by multidimensional development indicators, process-oriented and performance-based assessment methods, and empowering feedback, thereby returning evaluation to its ontological function of promoting student growth. This overall configuration provides a systematic pedagogical response for shifting mental health education from a deficit-compensation model to a potential-development model. Future explorations may focus on the concrete pathways of this model in different educational stages and cultural contexts, track its longitudinal effects on students' long-term psychological development and academic achievement, and further investigate how to optimize personalized experiences and interactive generation processes through modern educational technology, so as to continuously deepen and expand the breadth and depth of positive psychology in educational applications.

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