

Exploration of Teaching Reform on Interpersonal Relationship Themes in College Mental Health Education Courses

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Abstract: There are some problems with the theme of interpersonal relationships in college mental health education courses, such as fixed teaching content, failure to recognize cognitive biases, and a lack of correspondence with changes in relationships. Based on the theory of social and emotional learning and relational development psychology, the three-dimensional structure of core competencies in interpersonal relationships (relationship cognition, relationship regulation and relationship construction) will be broken down in this paper first. Therefore, it can be seen that there are too few links in the current curriculum and teaching blind spots that align with students' cognitive misunderstandings. Some suggestions for organising the teaching logic in this paper are to move from fixed knowledge to creating relational situations, structurally integrate the analysis of interaction scripts, and align the sequence of teaching with the development stages of relational tension. Based on the above, an integrated and progressive teaching intervention model with reversible regulation paths according to conflict nodes has been developed, and a dual-trigger system of self-referential and empathetic loops and a hierarchically embedded logic of relationship boundary awareness have also been created. The goal of this model is to enhance the practicality of course content in light of real life and foster students' sense of situation awareness in their studies and self-management.

Keywords: Mental Health Education, Teaching of Interpersonal Relationships, Reconstruction of Teaching Logic, Intervention Model, Relational Dynamics

Introduction

Most of the current teaching on the theme of interpersonal relationships in college mental health education courses focuses on behaviour, such as communication skills and conflict resolution; it pays little attention to the intrinsic nature of relationships, their contextual dependence and students' internal cognitive biases. The contents of the courses are usually organised in an orderly way or presented as simple formulas, and do not have the typical problems of conflict, role reversal and blurred boundaries. At the same time, the cognitive patterns students have developed over a long period of socialisation, such as the intention-certainty bias and the emotion-inference loop, have also not been properly considered. Therefore, there is a gap in knowledge between what is taught in class and students' actual lives. In line with the psychology of relational development and the theory of social-emotional learning, this paper puts forward a reform framework for relationally oriented teaching at three levels: deconstruction of content, reconstruction of teaching logic, and integration of intervention strategies; thus, it provides a theoretical basis for organising course content and designing teaching sequences.

1. Content Deconstruction and Cognitive Biases in Interpersonal Relationship Teaching at Colleges

1.1 Dimensional Division of Core Competencies in Interpersonal Relationships and Their Teaching Map

For the theme of interpersonal relationships in college mental health education courses, the organisation of the content should be based on a clear framework of core competency dimensions. Based on the theory of social-emotional learning and relational development psychology, three linked parts can be identified in the element of interpersonal relationship competence: the dimension of relationship cognition (knowing how to recognise and interpret others' emotions, intentions and social cues), the dimension of relationship regulation (being able to manage one's own emotions, handle

conflicts, set boundaries, etc.), and the dimension of relationship construction (various ways of communicating, cooperative behaviour and the development of prosocial behaviour). All of the above factors can affect a person in various ways and need to be dealt with differently. The size of relational cognition is based on situational simulation and attribution training; the dimension of relational regulation should show the interaction between emotional arousal and regulation strategies; and the dimension of relational construction should contain interaction scripts and feedback loops^[1].

Based on the above dimensions, we need to change the order of the thematic units in the current courses. The general content of the current textbooks, such as communication skills, conflict resolution and empathy training, cover all the necessary abilities but do not specify which part of the ability they belong to. The first kind of teaching map is to build a chain of activities based on dimensions; for example, exercises in interpreting nonverbal cues and changing one's own attitude can be used for the dimension of relationship cognition, training on response selection in high-stress interactive situations can be applied to the dimension of relationship regulation, and multi-round cooperative activities with reflective journals are suitable for the dimension of relationship construction. Organise the division of dimensions and systematically teach maps so that teachers do not present the teaching of interpersonal relationships as a set of independent skills but create a course structure with intrinsic logic for competency development.

1.2 Simplification of Relational Dynamics in the Course Content

Most of the chapters on interpersonal relationships in the current college mental health education courses only cover simple, fixed patterns of relationships among people. Simplification can be seen in the flattened description of the stages of a relationship; for example, the phases of getting to know each other, meeting, fighting and reconciling are often presented as a linear process, and the actual characteristics of repetition, backtracking and non-linear development in the course of the relationship are overlooked. Most of the communication formulas in the teaching materials, such as "I-messages" and steps for active listening, are very regular and divide fluid situations into independently learnable technical modules. Although the previous way is easy for beginners to learn, it does not create a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity in interpersonal relationships, so there is a gap between what is taught in class and actual life experience.

To reduce the complexity of relations, one can increase the level of abstraction of case settings and situations. Most of the courses deal with interpersonal problems that have clear boundaries, such as misunderstandings among friends or dormitory conflicts over daily life, but they rarely, if ever, address continuous tension in relational dynamics, subtle changes in the process of identity negotiation, and the implicit construction of interaction paths by asymmetric power. The framework of judgment that students have learned from the simplified course content often lacks explanatory power in light of changes in real life, and they may attribute fluctuations in relationships to a single cause or look for formulaic solutions. First, some teaching reforms need to be introduced; that is to say, the original characteristics of relational dynamics in content design should be preserved, and at the same time, full attention should be paid to the reversibility, multi-factoriality and context-dependence of relational evolution during curriculum reconstruction^[2].

1.3 Common Misjudgments in Students' Interpersonal Cognitive Patterns and Corresponding Teaching Blind Spots

College students have already formed interpersonal cognitive patterns in their long-term socialisation and bring these to the class for mental health education. Other typical kinds of misjudgments in this pattern include the intention certainty bias (directly attributing the behaviour of others to stable intentions), the emotional inference loop (inferring the nature of a relationship based on one's own emotions), and unidirectional locking of responsibility attribution (continuously placing the blame for conflict on oneself or the other party). These errors are not only due to a lack of knowledge but also result from people's usual perception of the world of relations and automatic psychological responses. If only the correct principles of interpersonal relationships are taught in class and the underlying cognitive biases are not addressed, students may be able to understand the new knowledge conceptually but still apply their original mistaken judgments in their lives and in social situations.

The above cognitive biases show that there are teaching blind spots in the current course content. At present, most of the teaching focuses on training skills and correcting behaviour at the level of behaviour; there is no systematic plan to identify and reconstruct cognitive schemas. The three types of

teaching blind spots are as follows: There is no systematic screening of students' typical misjudgments; therefore, we do not know how far off their initial thoughts are from the correct knowledge during teaching; there is no analysis of the formation mechanism for these misjudgments, and students do not learn why their own judgments are wrong; finally, there is no specific task-setting for cognitive reconstruction, so merely informing them of the correct principles will not change their deep-seated interpretive habits. Given the problems mentioned above, teachers can use metacognitive monitoring tools in their teaching to help students be more aware of the automatic patterns in their own interpersonal judgments and build an organised feedback loop that can be flexibly adjusted according to changes in their cognitive framework.

2. Reconstruction of Teaching Logic Based on Relational Processes

2.1 A Shift in Teaching from Static Knowledge to the Generative Mechanism of Relational Situations

Traditional teaching of interpersonal skills generally considers them to be separate areas of knowledge that need to be taught, such as communication rules, listening skills and steps in conflict resolution. Static knowledge orientation is to present the teaching content propositionally and assume that students can automatically apply the rules in real life after learning them. Interpersonal interaction is, in fact, a dynamic generative process; the words, emotions and behaviours expressed in a particular relationship at a certain time are produced under certain contextual conditions and do not simply reproduce existing knowledge. The main direction of the teaching shift is to move the focus of the course from "what good interpersonal behaviour is" to "how good interpersonal behaviour is produced in specific situations"; that is, to concentrate on the components of relational situations, the interaction of various factors during interaction, and real-time adjustments in behaviour choices^[3].

Add a new section for the basic units in the course content. The static knowledge modules should be arranged in accordance with the analysis framework for the generative mechanism of relational situations; that is to say, we need to identify the attributes of a situation (such as the proximity of the relationship, the purpose of interaction and the division of power), determine how the situation constrains behavioural choices, and investigate the reverse shaping effect of behavioural outcomes on situations. Communication skills will no longer be taught in a separate class; instead, they will be integrated into all sections of the "creating situations" activity to show how different choices in behaviour affect the development of relationships. By showing changes in the relationships among people, students can develop a sense of the situation in interpersonal relationships, reduce their dependence on general rules to an excessive degree, and thus cultivate flexibility and adaptability in their judgment of people.

2.2 Structured Introduction of Interaction Script Analysis in Classroom Teaching

An interaction script is a type of mind map that people have learned through long-term socialisation and use to guide their behaviour in social situations; generally speaking, it contains an outline of the situation, the expected order of various people's roles, and appropriate responses. Adding the analysis of interaction scripts to the courses in mental health education will help students systematically learn about their own and others' interpersonal behaviour patterns. The three stages of classroom teaching can be divided into script identification, script deconstruction and script reconstruction. Students can identify automatic behaviour in some interpersonal situations from the script during the script identification stage; in the script deconstruction stage, they will analyse the components of this behaviour, such as trigger conditions, behavioural steps, role expectations and desired results after executing the script; and in the script reconstruction stage, they can create different scripts to achieve various relational goals in the same situation.

Organised Introduction of Interaction Script Analysis Aligns the Distribution of Cognitive Load in Classroom Teaching. Traditional teaching usually has to have students directly try new behaviour; script analysis can first reduce the psychological resistance to behaviour modification and help students learn about the formation logic and operation boundaries of their own automatic patterns at a metacognitive level. Based on the typical scripts of common relational situations, many classroom activities can be developed, such as response patterns after being refused help, avoidance of speaking in group discussions, and suppression of emotions in close relationships. By structurally extracting scripts from the background of unconscious behaviour and observing them, students can learn about the many choices available to them in daily life and thus lay a foundation for self-regulation of behaviour.

2.3 The Fitting Design of Teaching Sequences to the Changing Stages of Relational Tension

As the people in a relationship get older, there will be many more conflicts and adjustments; different psychological needs will arise at this time, and thus changes in behaviour will occur. If the Design of teaching sequences is to be in line with changes in relational tension, then the organisation order of course units should be consistent with the time-series logic of relationship development. At the beginning of a relationship, teaching should focus on forming an impression and recognizing social cues; as the relationship develops, the teaching content should gradually move towards self-disclosure regulation and boundary negotiation to build trust; when there are signs of accumulated tension in the relationship, emotion regulation and attributions flexibility training need to be added; finally, in the stage of tension release and repair, responsibility communication and strategies for restarting the relationship should be taught. The above Design is to ensure that when students encounter a particular relationship problem, they have already been taught how to deal with it in their previous studies^[4].

To introduce the new levels of conflict in the class gradually, we should also change how the activities are organised in each period. The difficulty of the teaching units will not increase gradually anymore; instead, at certain times in the course of teaching, there will be deliberate fluctuations in difficulty to help students gradually adjust to the changes in cognitive load caused by such fluctuations. For example, in a unit with the theme of conflict, the teacher can first present a neutral situation to collect information in the training stage, then introduce a slightly incongruous situation for emotion recognition training, and finally gradually increase the tension of a high-tension situation that requires position coordination. With this gradient Design, students will be able to feel the curve of the development of relational tension in the teaching environment and learn how to deal with it at different times under controlled conditions. Organise the teaching sequence according to the stages of relational tension to create an organised system that covers all times in the course of relationships, rather than just a list of individual skills.

3. Integration and Progressive Model of Teaching Intervention Strategies

3.1 Reversible Teaching Regulation Pathways Based on Relational Conflict Nodes

Relational conflict usually has a directional bifurcation at some nodes, and the various response modes will result in repair, deadlock or harm to the relationship. Design of Reversible Teaching Regulation Pathways Based on Relational Conflict Nodes: Identification of Several Typical Critical Points for Conflict in the Curriculum and Provision of Executable Positive and Negative Regulation Solutions for Each Node. The positive regulation pathway is the process of relationship repair, and the negative regulation pathway shows a general deterioration response at the same conflict node and its gradual consequences. By showing the two opposite behavioural choices and their results at the same node, students can learn that relational processes in the teaching environment are path-dependent and understand how early intervention can change the course of conflict.

The teaching implementation of the reversible regulation pathway should be organised by adding conflict nodes to the course activities in an orderly manner. Each node is a part of the relationship, and the students will have many options in the simulated environment; based on their choices, different follow-up actions will be displayed by the system. The Design of teaching pathways is reversible; that is to say, after students see the results of choosing one path, they can return to a conflict node and try another path, repeatedly examining the causal chain in the relational process. The Design does not require students to make the correct choice on the first try; instead, it will collect their knowledge of conflict mechanisms through several rounds of path traversal. The links between nodes are also bidirectional, so one can compare the combined effects of regulation at different nodes. Reversible-pathway training for relational conflict nodes can help students learn that the origin of interpersonal conflict is not fixed but unstable, and they can repeatedly practise intervening in small-scale situations by taking part in such exercises.

3.2 A Dual Teaching Trigger Framework of Self-referential and Empathic Loops

The development of interpersonal relationship competence is the result of the joint operation of two psychological loops; that is, the self-referential loop helps individuals recognise their own emotions, needs and boundaries in relationships, and the empathic loop helps them understand the inner world of others from different perspectives. The two loops should be started at the beginning of the lesson

simultaneously, not alternately. Traditional teaching often starts with empathy training and has students consider others' perspectives; however, it does not take into account that students will be unable to empathise effectively if they have not yet learned to recognise their own emotions clearly. The teaching logic of the dual-trigger framework is to first activate the self-referential loop, and after students have located their own emotions and needs in a particular relational situation, guide them to switch to the empathic loop and achieve a cognitive shift from self to others.

The two-trigger model can be used to organise the situations in the teaching activities of this class. At the same time, the teaching activity first has students map their own internal states in a first-person way and note changes in emotion, boundaries and behaviour at that time; then, from a third-person perspective, they are asked to infer others' states and guess what might have happened inside and why that other person behaved as they did during the interaction. The interval of the two loops has been shortened, and now they are connected so that students can switch from self-anchoring to other-mapping in a short amount of time. Selection and preparation of teaching materials should have loop symmetry; that is, the time spent on the empathic task should not be much longer than the time for the self-referential task. Continue to use the dual-trigger framework so that students can learn to switch between the two loops spontaneously in real social situations, avoid being either self-centered or overly concerned about others, and strengthen their ability for mutual regulation in relationships.

3.3 The Hierarchically Embedded Logic of Relationship Boundary Awareness in Teaching Segments

Awareness of the boundary of one's own area of function, emotions and responsibilities in life and that of others during interaction with others is called relationship boundary awareness. The formation of this consciousness should not be taught as a separate item; rather, in light of the hierarchy of logic, its cultivation can be spread across all levels of cognitive complexity in different parts of the curriculum. The first level is basic perceptual embedding: At the beginning of the course, teachers will use nonverbal cue recognition activities to help students learn to notice boundary signals in people, such as how far apart they are, eye contact and response time. The second stage is concept clarification embedding; in thematic units such as "relationship conflict" and "self-disclosure", teachers will provide conceptual explanations for all kinds of boundaries and link them with situations of boundary ambiguity that students encounter in activities according to the relevant terminological system. The third is the strategy of regulation embedding; that is to say, in serious cases that require distributing responsibility, refusing requests, protecting privacy, etc., educators teach students how to negotiate boundaries and maintain them.

Curricular operability of the hierarchically embedded logic can be seen in the different teaching units that take on various functions in the cultivation of boundary awareness. At the level of communication skills, one can add exercises to recognise boundary signals instead of teaching the whole theory of boundaries; in the unit on intimate relationships, real-time response training for situations of boundary violation can be introduced; and in the unit of conflict resolution, structured steps for repairing boundaries and renegotiating them can be added. Teaching content at different stages has various degrees of cognitive demand and behavioural requirements, so boundary problems are not all covered by a single rule. Hierarchical embedding can be used to have different students start at different levels according to their current state of boundary perception, and thus avoid excessive uniformity in teaching content. Through the Design of hierarchical embedding in the course, awareness of relational boundaries is no longer presented as an isolated element in moral education but has become an obvious, discussable and modifiable unit of psychological operation.

Conclusion

The three steps in this paper to improve teaching of interpersonal relations are content analysis, logical reconstruction and introduction of intervention models. Three-dimensional division of core competencies in terms of content has been introduced; the trend of simplification in relational dynamics within the curriculum has been shown; and teaching blind spots corresponding to students' cognitive biases have been identified. At the level of logic, it proposes to change the teaching focus to the analysis of the generative mechanism of relational situations, introduce interaction script analysis, and adjust teaching sequences according to the different stages of relational tension. At the level of intervention, there are reversible regulation paths based on conflict nodes, a dual-trigger system of self-reference and empathy, and a hierarchically nested logic of boundary awareness. In the future, we will develop corresponding assessment instruments to study the independent and interactive effects of

the components of intervention, and also investigate the dose effect of tension fitting in teaching sequences and its impact on learning transfer.

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