

Construction of Training System for College Students' Peer Psychological Counselors under the Concept of "Three-All Education": A Case Study of Zhaoqing University

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Abstract: Peer psychological counseling work in some colleges and universities in China has still received attention and achieved good research results. Fully mobilizing students' subjectivity, enhancing the self-help and mutual assistance functions of student groups, and using the concept of "Three-All Education" to train college peer psychological counselors are conducive to the localization of peer psychological counseling and truly better serving students. At present, there is still a lack of theoretical and practical research on the construction of peer psychological counselor team training in the university system. Therefore, this study attempts to focus on the training practice of college students' peer psychological counselor teams under the concept of "Three-All Education", and construct a training system in line with the actual situation in the university, covering selection, training, assessment, business and team building, to improve the mental health self-help and mutual assistance ability of peer members.

Keywords: Peer psychological counseling; Training system; Three-All Education; Psychological education; Localization practice

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1. Introduction

Peer counseling refers to a process where non-professional mental health workers, after selection, training, and supervision, provide interpersonal support with counseling functions to help-seekers of similar age. Developed since the 1960s, peer counseling has become a widely adopted form of peer mutual assistance in the United States ^[1]. In China, there are also efforts in cultivating and building peer counseling/guidance teams, such as those at Nanjing University ^[2] and Renmin University of China ^[3-5]. As early as the early 21st century, scholars proposed that peer counseling offers a valuable attempt to address the shortage of psychological counselors in

China^[6], and strengthening peer psychological counseling can improve the mental health support system for college students^[7]. To this day, peer counseling work continues to receive attention and in-depth research in some universities^[8-10]. Fully mobilizing students' subjectivity, enhancing the self-help and mutual assistance functions of student groups, and cultivating college peer counselors under the concept of "Three-All Education" (education through the whole process, in all aspects, and by all members) are conducive to the localization of peer counseling, enabling it to better serve students in practice.

However, previous studies have mostly focused on the impact of the "Three-All Education" concept on the overall mental health education system^[11,12]. Research on cultivating peer counselor teams under this concept remains limited in quantity^[13,14], with low citation rates and limited influence. While there are some theoretical and practical studies on peer mutual assistance systems in psychological education (e.g., peer counselors, psychological committee members)—such as Promoting Psychological Education through Peer Mutual Assistance by Lu *et al.*^[15] and Exploration of College Peer Psychological Mutual Assistance Systems under the "Three-All Education" Concept by Tan *et al.*^[16]—the overall volume of such research is still small. There is also a lack of theoretical and practical studies on constructing a training system for peer counselor teams within the college framework. Therefore, this study aims to focus on the practice of cultivating peer counselor teams, establish a training system that aligns with the actual conditions of the university, and ultimately enhance peer members' abilities in self-help and mutual assistance regarding mental health.

2. Training system for peer psychological counselor team

The peer psychological counselors in our university belong to the "Peer Psychological Counseling Studio" (hereinafter referred to as the peer team), a student group under the guidance of the Psychological Center of the Student Affairs Department. From selection, training, and assessment to daily task performance, as well as funding support and venue management, all are handled by full-time psychological teachers (i.e., instructors) from the Psychological Center. The peer team typically has 20-24 regular members, with one instructor, two student leaders, and one person in charge of study groups and publicity, respectively. The team has long adopted flat management to improve work efficiency.

2.1. Member selection

Team members are recruited once a year, and the targets are usually first-year students majoring in applied psychology and psychological committee members of freshmen classes in a certain college. Students are required to be interested in psychological counseling, willing to learn, and proactive. After official members conduct online and offline promotions, applicants will go through regular registration (where their experience as student leaders, hobbies, and strengths can be learned), group learning, written tests (self-designed questions related to peer psychological counseling and psychological counseling knowledge), and interviews (including introduction of themselves and learning status, on-site simulation of peer counseling within a time limit, question-and-answer based on randomly selected questions from a question bank, and reverse questioning). Those who pass all these links will become probationary peer counselors. During the preparation for the written test and interview, applicants complete group learning and independent learning on their own initiative in pre-divided groups, and their performance in these aspects is evaluated during the written test and interview. Specifically, the learning atmosphere within the group, the learning progress of group members, and the smoothness of intra-group collaboration can all reflect a student's interpersonal skills, affability, self-learning

ability, and whether they have the inherent potential to become a peer counselor.

2.2. Internal training

In daily training, the peer team has established diverse learning systems and methods, including mentorship-led learning, internal regular meeting-based learning, self-directed learning, and guidance from the team's supervising teacher. Under the concept of "Three-All Education" (education involving all staff, throughout the entire process, and in an all-round manner), the training implements a psychological education model that embodies these principles, enabling peers to support and help each other in different roles while gaining personal growth.

Mentorship-led learning refers to a one-on-one pairing system where senior team members guide junior members. Learning methods include, but are not limited to, simulated interviews, mock consultations, key point discussions in psychological counseling, as well as guidance, teaching, and experience sharing in peer work. Senior members benefit from their past learning experiences when guiding juniors, while the role transition from learner to mentor allows them to re-examine their existing knowledge from new perspectives, which is highly beneficial for knowledge reconstruction and skill consolidation.

Internal regular meetings, held once a week, include two forms: learning led by the supervising teacher and peer group learning. These meetings focus on specific topics related to psychological counseling work (see learning content below). For peer group learning, each group consists of members from two academic years to ensure knowledge exchange between different grades. First semester content: self-compiled materials (led by the teacher): Basic guidelines for receiving clients at the psychological center, core principles and procedures of peer counseling, and key points and processes for freshman adaptation interviews. Materials (led by the teacher): Ethical issues (studying the Ethical Guidelines for Clinical and Counseling Psychology Practice of the Chinese Psychological Society^[17]). Textbook: Counseling Skills Training (edited by Ma Shuqin and Ran Liwen, published by Southwest Jiaotong University Press), focusing on techniques for building counseling relationships, participatory counseling skills, and influential counseling skills, studied by groups through themed discussions. Second semester content: relaxation training (mainly practicing progressive muscle relaxation). Case conceptualization (textbook: using the solution-focused brief therapy chapter from Case Approach to Counseling and Psychotherapy by Gerald Corey to introduce case conceptualization and guide students in forming case conceptualizations from a solution-focused perspective). Applications of solution-focused brief therapy, narrative therapy, and cognitive-behavioral therapy techniques in peer counseling. Except for relaxation training and case conceptualization (led by the teacher), other topics are studied through group learning by team members. During meetings, learning is shared through activities such as introducing basic concepts, demonstrating technical applications, on-site simulations, and receiving questions and suggestions from the team. Regular meeting learning helps group members develop leadership and coordination skills, preparations for group presentations also enhance communication between senior and junior members. Meanwhile, on-site discussions allow both teachers and members to ask questions and exchange ideas, broadening everyone's horizons.

Self-directed learning means that peer team members engage in self-directed learning during semesters and holidays, primarily through reading relevant books, writing book reports and reflections, and conducting simulated peer counseling. During the summer vacation, junior members are required to read Counseling Skills Training and The Feeling of Ascending to the Sky, watch the Bilibili video course Hands-on Teaching of Psychological Counseling: The Art of Conversation, and complete corresponding book reports. During

the winter vacation: Junior members select one book from the internal reading list on solution-focused brief therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, or narrative therapy, write a book report, and submit simulated counseling dialogue records. Senior members only need to select books from the existing book list, read them, and write book reports. All reports will receive feedback from the instructor after they are reviewed.

The guidance from the team advisor refers to the process where peer team members report and communicate with the advisor about problems encountered in their study and work, or their learning progress during winter and summer vacations. After communicating with the students, the advisor provides guidance and strategies based on their specific situations. In addition, each member must seek supervision from the advisor for the first client case they receive in each semester.

2.3. Internal assessments

The peer team has an internal assessment system. First, the probationary peer assessment: the probation period is generally 3–4 months, including summer study and in-semester study. After completing the study, probationary peers will be assessed by instructors and formal members. The assessment method is a simulated interview on freshman adaptability, including a written test and an on-site performance evaluation. The key assessment points mainly focus on the probationary peers' learning attitude, study reports and achievements, communication within the team, book reports, task completion, written test results, and on-site performance during the assessment. Probationary peers who pass the assessment and are willing to join the team will become formal peers. Second, the assessment for independently receiving clients: junior formal peers who want to independently receive clients need to go through complete training, simulated consultation practice, and simulated consultation assessment. Only after passing the assessment, they start receiving clients. During the period of receiving clients, peer psychological counseling supervision must be conducted to ensure the well-being of clients and the safety of peers.

2.4. Enhancing peer competence through professional work

The peer team has four major regular businesses: First, providing peer psychological counseling services. It carries out peer psychological counseling on-duty work covering two campuses (the service locations are the psychological centers of the two campuses), receiving students of the university who have made appointments for peer counseling or visit temporarily. Second, carrying out campus road activities. The peer team holds stall promotion activities on the campus road every month/every other month to publicize and popularize mental health knowledge to students, and introduce the university's psychological center and peer psychological counseling services. The aim is to enable students to increase their understanding of mental health knowledge and improve their frustration resistance and coping abilities, with more than 1,000 participants per year. Third, tweet promotion. The peer team is responsible for contributing articles to the sub-columns "Xinxin Channel" and "Health Promotion Home" of the official WeChat account of the Student Affairs Department, "Yanyuan Student Affairs." The tweets in "Xinxin Channel" mainly popularize mental health knowledge about common psychological troubles of college students and how to deal with them; the previews and reviews of peer team activities are published in the "Health Promotion Home" column, which mainly publicize the activities carried out by the peer team and record the effectiveness of the activities, aiming to improve students' enthusiasm for participating in mental health knowledge popularization activities. The two types of tweets have a yearly publication volume of more than ten articles, with a total view count of over 10,000. Fourth, freshman adaptability interviews. The peer team assists each college of the university in carrying out freshman

adaptability interviews every year to understand the daily life and adaptation status of freshmen, and provides help and support for each college in carrying out mental health work. Peers grow through completing the above businesses in different jobs and positions.

2.5. Team cohesion building, management and incentives

To enhance team cohesion and mutual trust among members, the peer team regularly holds team-building activities, including outdoor development, meetings of the three grades, team-building games, etc., aiming to promote communication and cooperation among members through a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere. Given the particularity of peer work, instructors usually pay great attention to contact and interaction with members, focus on the mental health of members, and provide timely supervision or suggest stopping work if there are problems, to ensure the health of members. In addition, there is an annual selection of excellent peer counselors to encourage peers to learn from excellent members.

3. Challenges and reflections

In practice, peer teams have encountered many challenges:

- (1) The limited training time, varying additional training hours, and differences in members' comprehension abilities may all lead to significant disparities in members' performance within the team.
- (2) It is difficult to carry out hierarchical learning and group supervision. The author once recruited senior members voluntarily to conduct group supervision of peer cases, but students reported that this task was too difficult and they were unable to cope with it. Moreover, since the consent of the clients must be obtained in advance, senior peer members tend to back down. As a result, it is quite difficult to implement in reality, and other strategies have to be adopted to increase the opportunities for peers to receive supervision.
- (3) Currently, apart from consolidating the foundation, there are still relatively few opportunities for peer counseling practice. Because peers are also students, some clients are unwilling to try the peer psychological counseling service.

4. Conclusion

In general, the professional work of peer teams is an extension of the work of the psychological center. If the work of the psychological center is adjusted in the future, the orientation of peer training will inevitably undergo reforms. In addition, as the post-2000s generation has become the backbone of college students, how to combine training objectives with students' characteristics is also the key to training peer counselors in the next step. With the update of policies, initiatives such as psychological education and the simultaneous development of the five educations (morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor) have been put forward, so the training of peer counselors in the future must keep pace with the times.

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