

# Multidimensional Role and Ability Construction of Teachers Participating in Psychological Crisis Intervention in Higher Vocational Colleges

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**Abstract:** With the deepening of social transformation and educational reform, the psychological health problems of vocational college students are becoming more and more complicated, and psychological crisis intervention has become an important link in the educational system of vocational colleges. Teachers, as the most frequent contact group with students, play an irreplaceable key role in it. This paper aims to reflect on and explore the path of effective participation of teachers in psychological crisis intervention in higher vocational colleges. Firstly, this paper systematically analyzes the realistic difficulties faced by teachers, such as role ambiguity, lack of ability, and weak support system, and then constructs a four-dimensional role model of teachers composed of “discoverer, guide, intervener, and coordinator” to clarify the boundaries of their responsibilities. Finally, around this model, systematic paths such as perfecting stratified training, constructing a gridding response system, establishing a multi-coordination mechanism, and creating a supportive environment are deeply considered to effectively enhance teachers' psychological crisis intervention ability, so as to provide theoretical references and practical enlightenment for enhancing the effectiveness of psychological crisis intervention in higher vocational colleges and promoting students' healthy growth.

**Keywords:** Higher vocational colleges; Psychological crisis intervention; Teacher role; Ability construction; Grid management

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## 1. Introduction

College students' mental health is an important issue related to national talent cultivation and social harmony and stability. Documents such as the *Special Action Plan for Strengthening and Improving Students' Mental Health Work in an All-round Way (2023–2025)* clearly point out that it is necessary to tap students' mental health work system and strengthen the psychological education of all staff, the whole process, and all directions. Higher vocational education, as half of China's higher education, has a diverse student source structure, and students generally face multiple challenges, such as academic foundation transformation, skill training pressure, career planning confusion, and social identity, which make them vulnerable to psychological crisis <sup>[1]</sup>. Under

this background, it is urgent to construct an efficient psychological crisis intervention system.

Compared with professional psychological counselors, teachers, class teachers, counselors, etc., in higher vocational colleges get along with students day and night, and can be the first to detect abnormal changes in students, which is the “first line of defense” for psychological crisis early warning and intervention <sup>[2]</sup>. However, there is a huge gap between theory and reality: many teachers are in an awkward position because of unclear responsibilities, weak ability, and insufficient support. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to think deeply about how to clarify the multidimensional role orientation of teachers in psychological crisis intervention and systematically explore the matching ability construction path for getting through the “last kilometer” of psychological education. This paper will try to construct the role model of teachers participating in psychological crisis intervention from the analysis of realistic predicament, and finally discuss the systematic capacity-building strategy.

## **2. Teachers in higher vocational colleges face multiple realistic challenges in participating in psychological crisis intervention**

### **2.1. Difficulties in role identification: Ambiguous orientation from “teacher” to “educator”**

Influenced by traditional educational ideas, some vocational teachers restrict their responsibilities strictly to knowledge imparting and skill training, and think psychological education is the “duty” of counselors or psychological counseling centers, with a cognitive deviation of “only teaching, regardless of psychology.” This ambiguity of role cognition is rooted in the lack of clear institutional regulations on teachers’ specific responsibilities in psychological crisis intervention at the school level, which leads to teachers’ hesitation in action when facing students’ psychological problems, fearing that “overstepping” or “improper handling” will lead to subsequent responsibilities <sup>[3]</sup>.

### **2.2. The difficulty of ability: The professional gap from “willingness” to “effectiveness”**

Although most teachers have a strong willingness to help students, they generally have shortcomings in their abilities. First of all, the recognition ability is insufficient. They lack systematic psychological knowledge; it is difficult to accurately distinguish common mood swings from precursors of psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety, and they are unable to identify risk signals of self-injury and suicide <sup>[4]</sup>. Second, intervention skills are lacking. When students ask for help or have an emotional breakdown, teachers often do not master basic listening, empathy, questioning, and stabilization techniques; conversation may flow into preaching or comfort, and even increase students’ psychological burden due to improper words. Finally, ethical decision-making is confusing. Teachers generally lack clear guidelines on when to break the confidentiality principle and how to communicate effectively and in compliance with parents, which makes them vulnerable to ethical dilemmas.

### **2.3. System support difficulties: Linkage barriers from “individual soldier” to “system”**

Psychological crisis intervention is a systematic project, and it is by no means a teacher’s ability alone. At present, many higher vocational colleges have not yet established a smooth and efficient referral and linkage mechanism. When teachers discover suspected crisis students, the reporting path to counselors, department leaders, and even school psychological counseling centers is complex and slow, resulting in delays in the optimal intervention period <sup>[5]</sup>. Outside school, teachers often communicate with parents because of parents’

lack of understanding and cooperation; there is also a lack of stable cooperation channels and green referral mechanisms with mental health professional institutions, which makes the intervention chain break at critical moments.

#### **2.4. Self-burden: Mental exhaustion from “helping” to “self-help”**

Higher vocational teachers themselves undertake heavy tasks of teaching, scientific research, and management. Participation in psychological crisis intervention undoubtedly increases their workload and psychological pressure. Faced with students’ negative emotions and crisis situations for a long time, teachers are prone to substitution trauma, anxiety, powerlessness, and other emotions. Lack of necessary organizational support and psychological counseling will not only affect the intervention effect, but also lead to job burnout and a threat to their mental health <sup>[6]</sup>, forming a vicious circle of “helping people difficult to help themselves.”

### **3. Constructing a four-dimensional role model is the key to defining teachers’ responsibilities**

In order to solve the above dilemma, teachers must be provided with a clear, feasible role action framework that does not exceed their responsibilities and capabilities. This paper attempts to construct a four-dimensional role model of “discoverer-guider-intervener-coordinator.”

#### **3.1. Front-end discoverer: “Early warning radar” for psychological crisis**

This role orientation emphasizes the observation and reporting functions of teachers and is the starting point of the intervention system. The core responsibility is not to make a psychological diagnosis, but to be a keen observer, paying attention to their non-verbal behaviors and changes by using all opportunities to contact students in class, after-class communication, homework feedback, practical guidance, etc. Behavior patterns include: persistent attention to student attendance, sudden decline in academic performance, persistent low or abnormally high emotional state, social withdrawal, and a sense of worthlessness or despair expressed in speech. Once abnormalities are detected, they are recorded immediately according to school regulations and reported to designated responsible persons (such as counselors) <sup>[7]</sup>.

#### **3.2. Empathy guide: The “soul partner” that students trust**

This role orientation emphasizes the emotional support and primary guidance function of teachers. The core responsibility is to establish a trusting student-student relationship and provide a safe outlet for students to vent their emotions. Behavioral paradigms require teachers to master basic communication skills: talk in private, safe settings, use active listening, empathetic responses (“I feel you’re upset”), and a noncritical attitude to help students express their emotions. By giving encouragement and positive perspective guidance, students can see their own resources and support systems and relieve temporary emotional distress <sup>[8]</sup>.

#### **3.3. First responder: A “stable hub” at a crisis site**

This role orientation is aimed at sudden and urgent psychological crisis events. The core responsibility is to stabilize the situation on site, ensure the personal safety of students, and initiate a professional response at the first time. Behavioral paradigms include maintaining calm when students are at risk of self-injury or injury, talking gently and firmly to students, removing potentially dangerous objects, and ensuring that they are in a safe environment. At the same time, immediately contact the school security office, psychological counseling

center, and student affairs department to report the situation clearly and accurately, rather than dealing with it alone<sup>[9]</sup>. The teacher's role is "stabilizer" and "information pathway," not "therapist."

### **3.4. Resource coordinator: A "bridge" to support systems**

This role orientation emphasizes the teacher's linking role in the support network. The core responsibility is to ensure that students are able to transition smoothly from non-professional support levels to professional support systems. Behavior patterns include: familiarizing with the appointment process and resources of school psychological counseling, assisting counselors to communicate with parents for the first time, and providing objective observation facts at school. After the professional intervention is started, according to the requirements of psychological counselors, cooperate with the provision of students' follow-up performance information at school to form a joint effort in educating people<sup>[10]</sup>.

## **4. A systematic approach is the fundamental guarantee for improving teachers' intervention capabilities**

Clear role orientation requires systematic capacity building as support. We must make joint efforts from multiple dimensions, such as system, training, coordination, and culture.

### **4.1. Realizing "all staff empowerment" with layered training**

Schools should establish a systematic and regular training system. First, implement hierarchical classification training. For new teachers, general training on basic mental health knowledge and crisis identification and early warning shall be provided; special skills training shall be provided for teachers in key positions such as head teachers and counselors, such as heart-to-heart conversation technology, preliminary crisis assessment and stabilization skills; advanced group counseling and case conceptualization shall be provided for backbone teachers interested in this<sup>[11]</sup>. Second, promote training in actual combat. Regular seminars and simulation exercises based on real cases are organized to enable teachers to practice skills in near-real situations and realize the transformation from theoretical knowledge to practical ability.

### **4.2. Constructing a clear "action path" with grid system**

Drawing lessons from the concept of grid management, a three-level intervention network with clear responsibilities and rapid response is constructed. The first grid (discovery report layer) is for all teachers and class teachers, responsible for daily observation and preliminary report. The secondary grid (preliminary disposal layer) is composed of faculty counselors and deputy secretaries, who are responsible for receiving reports, conducting preliminary evaluation, and intervention. The three-level grid (professional intervention level) is the school-level psychological counseling center and the Department of Education and Industry, responsible for professional evaluation, counseling, and referral<sup>[12]</sup>. To this end, it is necessary to compile and distribute the Manual of Psychological Crisis Intervention and clear flow charts to ensure that each teacher clearly defines "how to do when seeing problems, who to report and how to report" and breaks through information barriers.

### **4.3. Condensing "joint efforts of educating people" with a collaborative mechanism**

Internally, establish a mental health work linkage group composed of students, psychology, educational affairs, logistics, security, and other departments, hold regular joint meetings, report the situation, and coordinate

to handle complex cases. Externally, on the one hand, stable medical-school cooperation and green referral channels have been established with local mental health centers; on the other hand, standardized home-school communication guidelines have been formulated to improve the effectiveness and standardization of communication between teachers and parents, and to win support and cooperation from families <sup>[13]</sup>.

#### **4.4. Supporting environment to ensure sustainable development**

Schools must pay attention to teachers' mental health and professional development. Establish a case supervision system, regularly invite experts inside and outside the school to carry out professional supervision on difficult cases handled by teachers, which not only helps to improve their professional ability, but also provides them with emotional catharsis and a professional support space to deal with alternative trauma. At the same time, build a caring culture, set up a teacher psychological support hotline or workshop, actively pay attention to teachers' psychological state, reduce their professional pressure, and ensure that this "first line of defense" team can continue to function healthily <sup>[14]</sup>.

### **5. Conclusion**

This paper gives a systematic consideration to the effective participation of higher vocational college teachers in psychological crisis intervention. Facing the increasingly prominent mental health problems of vocational college students, it is very important to give full play to the role of teachers as "front end" and "hub." Based on the systematic analysis of the multiple challenges faced by teachers, this paper attempts to construct a four-dimensional role model of "discoverer-guider-intervener-coordinator" in order to provide clear behavior guidelines for teachers. Furthermore, this paper considers that the construction of capability is a systematic project, which needs to be improved from concept to practice, from individual capability to organizational effectiveness through multi-measures such as hierarchical training, grid management, multi-coordination, and supportive environment construction. The purpose of this study is to provide theoretical reference and practical enlightenment for higher vocational colleges to clarify teachers' responsibilities and optimize management mechanisms, so as to implement "psychological education for all," effectively prevent and intervene in psychological crises, and protect the healthy growth and talents of higher vocational students. Future research should focus on more refined issues, such as the application of digital means in early warning and the differences in role-playing among teachers with different professional backgrounds.

### **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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