

# Curriculum Reform Exploration in Applied Psychology Majors at Normal Universities: A Case Study of the "Group Psychological Counseling" Course

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## Abstract

Normal universities' applied psychology programs are undergoing transformation and reform toward application-oriented undergraduate institutions, with curriculum reform at its core. Group Psychological Counseling, a representative course integrating theoretical and practical aspects, has undergone curriculum reform aligned with application-oriented talent development requirements. This reform emphasizes cultivating "specialized talents" in curriculum objectives, developing "professional competencies" in instructional content design, prioritizing practical experiences and blended learning approaches in teaching methods, and emphasizing knowledge application and diversity in assessment. This study provides reference for developing effective curriculum reform models in applied psychology programs at normal universities.

**Keywords:** Applied Psychology, Group Psychological Counseling, Curriculum Reform

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## 1. Introduction

With rapid social and economic development and drastic changes in societal demands, China has guided select local undergraduate institutions to transform into application-oriented universities, shifting the focus of talent cultivation toward applied technical and skilled professionals while enhancing students' employability and entrepreneurial capacities. Normal universities' applied psychology programs are at the forefront of this transformation, with curriculum reform as their core. Curriculum reform and its practical implementation are pivotal for improving teaching quality and represent both the highlights and challenges of educational reforms.

In contemporary society, there is an increasing demand for highly qualified applied psychology professionals. However, current graduates face significant employment challenges, primarily due to a severe misalignment between applied psychology education and societal needs, as well as gaps between program objectives and those of application-oriented universities. To address these issues, normal universities must undertake profound reforms in their applied psychology programs. The Group Psychological Counseling Course is a highly representative professional course in the applied psychology major. It integrates both theoretical and practical dimensions, emphasizing the cultivation and enhancement of students' professional practical skills. Taking the "Group Psychological Counseling" course as an example, this study explores curriculum reforms in teaching content, methodology, and assessment systems to establish an effective reform model tailored to applied psychology education.

## 2. Current Issues in Group Psychological Counseling Course Instruction

### 2.1 Insufficient Focus in Teaching Content

Traditional curricula for group psychological counseling courses prioritize extensive theoretical knowledge over practical specialization. The content often spans broad, generic topics, attempting to cover "more and better" material while neglecting the program's specialized focus on applied psychology and the institution's teacher-training mission. This lack of focused content makes it challenging to cultivate students' targeted competencies and achieve the goal of training "specialized talents." Furthermore, teaching objectives predominantly emphasize knowledge acquisition rather than fostering students' worldviews, values, or overall quality, compromising the development of "well-rounded individuals."

## *2.2 Traditional Teaching Methods Limiting Effectiveness*

Current pedagogical approaches in group psychological counseling courses face significant challenges in meeting modern educational goals. First, instructors rely heavily on lecture-based methods, supplemented by limited practical exercises. While the course combines theoretical and practical components, the overreliance on traditional instruction undermines student engagement and hinders the development of practical leadership skills for group counseling. Second, despite advancements in AI, online learning technologies, and interactive tools, classroom instruction remains teacher-centered and static. For classes with 50+ students, this approach is particularly ineffective in cultivating adaptable, tech-savvy applied psychology professionals.

## *2.3 Single-Dimensional Assessment System*

The current evaluation framework for group psychological counseling courses exhibits a critical "practical application deficit." First, assessments primarily rely on paper-based assignments or final exams, neglecting practical skill evaluations and holistic measures of students' attitudes, qualities, and values. This results in incomplete and biased feedback on student learning outcomes. Second, assessment results are rarely used to guide curriculum improvements or inform teaching practices, creating a disconnect between evaluation and pedagogical innovation. Consequently, reforms lack actionable insights, hindering the realization of mutually beneficial teaching and learning outcomes.

# **3. Explorations in Curriculum Reform for Group Psychological Counseling Courses**

## *3.1 Reforms in Teaching Content*

### *3.1.1 Focus on School-Based Group Counseling*

The curriculum for group psychological counseling courses should center on aligning with the program's and institution's talent development goals. As an applied psychology major within a normal university, the course must adhere to two core orientations: normal education (teacher training) and applied practice. To cultivate competent school counselors, the modular curriculum should integrate theme-based group counseling content tailored to primary and secondary schools. Furthermore, practical training opportunities in schools should be embedded into the course to provide hands-on experience.

### *3.1.2 Integration of Ideological and Political Education*

Deepening Curriculum Integration of Ideological and Political Education. A "triple-integrated" teaching model is established to strengthen ideological and political education in courses. Building on traditional curricular content and objectives, the course now incorporates ideological and political education goals, committed to excavating curriculum integration of ideological and political education elements within classroom instruction. This model integrates theory, experience, and practice into a cohesive framework:

#### **a. Theoretical Integration:**

Incorporate ideological themes into lectures to guide students' value formation and moral development.

#### **b. Experiential Growth:**

Through group activities and collaborative learning, students reflect on self-awareness and refine their insights under instructor guidance, fostering intellectual and ethical growth.

#### **c. Practical Application:**

Evaluate educational outcomes through community service projects, enabling students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts while reinforcing their sense of social responsibility.

## *3.2 Reforms in Teaching Methods*

### *3.2.1 Pre-Class: Experiential Learning through Senior-Junior Mentorship*

Establish a mentorship program pairing senior and junior students to expand pre-class learning experiences. Prior to the formal start of the course, leverage opportunities for senior students to engage in group counseling practices across primary and secondary schools. By forming collaborative teams that blend experienced and novice learners, this approach enables freshmen to accumulate hands-on course-related experiences and stimulates their initial interest in the subject matter.

### *3.2.2 Blended Learning During Classes*

Break the traditional teacher-centered model by integrating online platforms (MOOCs, Psychological Skill

Training Systems) with offline classroom instruction. Utilize interactive tools like Yuzhutang and Xuetong to facilitate peer collaboration, real-time feedback, and data-driven monitoring of student progress. This approach addresses the challenges of managing large classes (e.g., 50+ students) and prepares tech-savvy professionals.

### *3.2.3 Post-Class: School-Community Integration Practice Teaching*

Construct a school-community integration practice platform to cultivate "practical talent with real skills and determination." Through experiential learning and cooperative learning, students complete personal leadership training for group counseling during modular classroom experiences, laying a solid foundation for becoming qualified group leaders. Based on the established school-community integration platform, students step out of campus boundaries, engage with diverse communities, apply their knowledge to establish and lead groups, serve group members, and consolidate and validate their learning outcomes through community service projects.

### *3.3 Reforms in Teaching Evaluation*

To align with the practical nature of group counseling courses and application-oriented educational goals, the evaluation system must shift from traditional knowledge-based assessments to a competency-focused, multidimensional framework. Key Implementation Strategies:

- a. Portfolio-Based Assessment: Track students' growth through portfolios containing evidence of theoretical understanding (e.g., developed counseling games), practical plans, and reflective journals from fieldwork.
- b. Multi-Stakeholder Feedback: Aggregate evaluations from four perspectives—students, peer groups, instructors, and community partners—across three dimensions (knowledge, skills, overall quality). This creates a comprehensive "learning portrait" to guide continuous improvement.
- c. Data-Driven Iteration: Use evaluation data to refine teaching strategies and strengthen the alignment between assessment outcomes and pedagogical innovation.

## **4. Conclusion**

In the context of the transformation of undergraduate institutions toward application-oriented education and curriculum reform, this study has systematically explored innovative pedagogical paradigms of applied psychology major courses, taking the group psychological counseling course of applied psychology major in normal universities as the reform sample.

At the level of curriculum content reform, the study has constructed a "dual-core driven" knowledge framework: On one hand, through "school-based" curriculum design, it integrates theme modules of primary/secondary school group counseling (such as academic adaptation, interpersonal communication, and career planning) with the cultivation of students' group counseling competencies. On the other hand, it innovatively implements a "three-in-one" ideological education integration model, ensuring that value education permeates the entire professional training process through the organic connection of theoretical indoctrination, experiential learning, and practical application.

In terms of pedagogical innovation, the reforms demonstrate a "three-stage progressive" characteristic: Prior to class, foundational practical cognition is established through senior-junior mentorship programs; during class, hybrid learning platforms enable coordinated online-offline teaching; after class, the "school-community" linkage practice platform strengthens skill conversion.

Regarding assessment system reconstruction, a "four-dimensional" evaluation matrix has been developed: Growth portfolio bags record learning trajectories, multi-stakeholder evaluation mechanisms involve student teammates, off-campus practice instructors, and other participants, forming a diversified assessment system.

By emphasizing "specialized talent" training objectives, focusing on "professional competencies" knowledge frameworks, innovating "practice-oriented" teaching models, and establishing "multidimensional dynamic" assessment mechanisms, the reforms have effectively addressed core issues in traditional courses, such as generalized teaching content, monotonized methods, and fragmented evaluations. This provides a replicable practical model for curriculum reform in psychology programs.

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