

## Narrative Therapy in the Work of College Students' Ideological and Political Education

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### ABSTRACT

*Narrative therapy theory believes that everyone is an expert in solving their own problems, 'people are not problems, problems are problems'. Narrative therapy mainly consists of the methods of listening to clients' stories, using appropriate questioning skills or letter files, amongst others, to externalise and deconstruct the problem-filled main story with the client, rewriting and enriching the positive side story. Counsellors apply the concept of narrative therapy to the ideological and political education of college students, thereby facilitating the establishment of a considerably positive teacher–student relationship and helping students view problems from a dual perspective. This type of therapy can immediately shorten the inner distance between teachers and students and enable students to recognise their own emotions and immediately engage in reflection. Through the discovery of rich side stories, students are guided to visualise their neglected 'shining points', thereby stimulating their internal growth momentum and enabling them to grow as superior individual.*

*Keywords: deconstruction; externalisation; narrative therapy; reconstruction*

### INTRODUCTION

The essence of college students' ideological and political education is to inspire and enhance their endogenous motivation, light up their life paths and promote their growth into talents in the process of self-education, self-management and self-service. In the actual work of daily ideological and political education for college students, counsellors provide extensive time and energy on students, but the results are not proportional. General Secretary Xi Jinping indicated that 'To do a good job in ideological and political work in colleges and universities, we must adapt to events, advance with the times and be new to the situation. We must follow the law of ideological and political work, follow the law of teaching and educating people, follow the law of student growth and continuously improve workability levels' (Xi, 2016). In the daily ideological and political education of college students, there is a necessity to keep the pulse, actively respond and resolve doubts, thereby solving their ideological problems and practical difficulties. The current research expounds on the basic concept of narrative therapy and its positive influence on the daily ideological and political education of college students. Therapy improves students' psychological flexibility and helps address their mental health growth (Hongtao, 2021). Moreover, this study demonstrates the application and effectiveness of this concept in practical endeavours. Narrative therapy provides a psychological perspective, thereby enabling counsellors to carry out the daily ideological and political education of college students.

### BASIC IDEA OF NARRATIVE THERAPY

Narrative therapy is a post-modern psychotherapy genre jointly created by Australian Michael White and New Zealander David Epston in the field of family therapy. Currently, narrative therapy is widely used in community social work, individual cases and group psychological counselling. It is believed that everyone has numerous inner strengths and are experts in facing

life challenges. Narrative therapy is mainly applied through listening to clients' stories, using appropriate questioning skills or letter files, amongst others, to externalise and deconstruct problem-filled main stories with clients, as well as rewriting and enriching (reconstructing) the positive side of stories (Zhang, 2016). Through integration and reshaping, visitors can jump out of the problem story, realise the varying impact of the problem, and understand their shining points to face life with these positive aspects.

## POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF NARRATIVE THERAPY ON THE IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

### RESPECT, CURIOSITY AND LISTENING, AND GIVING STUDENTS THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS

In the daily ideological and political education of college students, counsellors often unconsciously assume the role of an educator. Communication with students has become a conversation or preaching. Teachers say too much and students say less or even have no opportunities to express themselves. For example, the class becomes a task arrangement meeting or a church. Some counsellors feel hurt and think they are hardworking and sincere, but they fail to obtain the feedback they want. Hence, a crucial question should be answered: Where is the problem? Think about this question in another way. If we do not express or even have the opportunity to interrupt when communicating with people, how will we treat people who are communicating with us, and what kind of evaluation or feedback will we have in our hearts? The narrative therapy education method advocates respect for the subjective feelings of individuals, and enthusiasm for individual participation is particularly important (Duan, 2021). To achieve a good teacher–student interaction effect, teachers must be curious with students' ideas and experiences, listen carefully and use narrative questioning skills to enable students to fully express themselves. This endeavour increases the two-way understanding between teachers and students and also generates added value. For example, students will learn to think and develop self-confidence and communication skills in the process of continuous and full expression.

### PROVIDING A NEW PERSPECTIVE OF UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE AND PROBLEMS

A misunderstanding in our daily education work is to equate students' problems with students themselves. Under such a concept, students are easily given various labels, such as undisciplined, unmotivated, non-self-disciplined and selfish. Additionally, the work mentality has become the use of authority to correct behaviours and solve problems, such as using punishment to regulate the behaviour of self-disciplined students. However, the results are often unsatisfactory because in actual learning scenario we will find that people who are not self-disciplined are constantly a relatively concentrated group of people. When encountering these problems, teachers must not give up and we should think considerably on why students are constantly disobedient. We must firmly believe that everyone has the power to be good and we should think whether there is a better way. Can you walk into the hearts of students? The stories behind their problems should be understood and a breakthrough with students must be found.

Narrative therapy believes that people are not equivalent to the labels of problems, and that the relationship between people and problems should be clearly seen (White & David, 2013). When students are trapped by problems, the idea of being helpless can be easily produced or failures can easily fall into a bad cycle or a state of numbness. To attempt to liberate students from problems, we must firstly consider students and problems separately. Particularly, let the students consider 'I am me, and the problem is the problem', and let them realise their possible inner strength through the problems. To inspire them, let them actively find ways to master

problems. Consequently, students will become creative, know the way to develop different resources and eventually become free, thereby releasing them from the clutches of problems.

#### BREAK THE MODEL OF TREATING TEACHERS AS EXPERTS

Counsellors and teachers often lament that current students are markedly dependent and constantly ask teachers regarding large and small matters. Teachers are required to be problem-solving experts. Students complain that teachers are considerably busy to help them solve problems, teachers should also take the initiative to communicate extensively with students. However, the position of teachers should be clear: they are not ‘problem solving’ experts; should not directly tell students what must be done or how to do it; they should be ‘dialogue’ experts, in which narrative dialogue (e.g., ‘deconstructive questioning’, ‘open space questioning’) guides students to change old thinking patterns and habitual negative language; must focus on students’ self-change and self-development ability and find problems and the corresponding solutions from students through dialogues. Teachers do not engage in direct experience teaching but guide students to think through dialogue, develop problem-solving abilities and the available local experience hidden in students and allow students to express themselves. In doing so, students can find that they have energy and realise a sense of accomplishment in solving problems.

Narrative therapy emphasises that outsiders are not experts and that parties have specialised knowledge and insights and sufficient power for their own lives and relationships. Under the guidance of a narrative, teachers should firmly believe that everyone is a complete individual who can actively grow up. All students have their respective philosophies in life. Teachers cannot replace the thinking and growth of students and should let the latter experience things personally and analyse and think by themselves. Students should master the law of the development and change of one’s own things and take back the dominance of one’s own life.

#### NARRATIVE THERAPY USED IN THE DAILY IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

##### LISTENING: STUDENTS TELL STORIES

White and David (2013) believed that stories or self-assumptions determine how we shape life experience. We do not survive through life stories, but stories comprise and embrace our lives (Zhang, 2017). Narrative therapy theory believes that people and problems should be defined separately; hence, narrative therapy theory is not aimed at the actual problems but focuses on the narrative of problems (Wang, 2020). In the daily ideological and political education, a respectful and understanding dialogue environment should be created to enable students develop the willingness to tell their stories. Numerous times, students’ problems appear in the main stories they tell. Through listening and retelling, amongst others, instructors help students discover hidden positive experiences other than the problem story and create new side stories with students.

##### EXTERNALISATION: IDENTIFY PROBLEMS

People’s troubles often arise and confuse the self with problems, internalise problems and form negative self-awareness. Narrative therapy believes that the actual problems are the problem, and people are not the same as the problem. That is, problems can be separated from people, and the latter is the master of problem management. This situation is called externalisation. When students narrate their own stories, they often revolve around certain problems. Counsellors find an appropriate time and ask students to give names to problems that bother

them. Through this process, students can gradually realise that problems can be separated, described, dealt with and solved. Hence, students can feel positive power, generate confidence in problem-solving and look at themselves again.

#### DECONSTRUCTION: LOOK FOR FLASH EVENTS

Constructivism believes that people come from different growth backgrounds, and they view things and problems from different perspectives. That is, everyone's perspective on problems is constructed. In the same way that people treat problems with their attitudes and perspectives, there can also be a deconstructive way (Wang et al., 2020). The deconstruction process entails enabling students tell their feelings about problems, origin of ideas, their influence on themselves and the corresponding results. By tracing past stories, students can learn the positive and influential stories they have overlooked. However, these situations are exceptions to the problems. They can also be called flash events, side stories and events of special significance.

#### REFACTORING: REWRITING LIFE STORY

When people come to consultants as visitors with numerous questions, the former uses the cognition that was constructed to view the problems to describe their life stories (Li & Gao, 2013). Through deconstruction, students realise that in addition to the adverse effects of problems, there remain some flashing incidents, which are important sources in rewriting life stories. At this time, students come out of the 'dual judgment' model, in which they classify things by 'good or bad' or 'right or wrong' but use the 'knowledge' model instead of the 'dual judgment' model. Students begin to develop a relationship with problems, thereby eliminating such problems. Students are encouraged to view things in a diversified manner, use narrative language to 'dialogue' with them and through the interaction of communication, help them explore additional information behind their troubles, create new meanings and find new directions and strengths (Huang, 2017). When these flash events are connected and integrated, students can reconstruct a positive self and transfer this positive sense of self-identity to other experiences.

#### CASES OF APPLYING NARRATIVE THERAPY TO COLLEGE STUDENTS' DAILY IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

The author concurrently serves as head teacher of a graduating class. In the university, the class has changed three head teachers for various reasons, and the author is the fourth one. The first time I met the students was at the employment mobilisation meeting. When the author discussed with student's postgraduate entrance examinations and employment, amongst others, they were expressionless; when the class sent messages, only a few people responded. The students felt numb owing to the frequent replacement of head teachers. The author used the concept of narrative therapy to accompany and support students, thereby achieving good results. Table 1 shows the process of accompanying students to help them sort out and re-cognise problems and their own records.

TABLE 1. Class Member "Narrative" Accompanying Record

|   | <b>Narrative stories</b>  | <b>Externalisation:<br/>Name the<br/>problems</b> | <b>Deconstruction: Flash<br/>events (or side stories)</b>       | <b>Reconstruction:<br/>Rewrite the stories</b>              |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | I have to go to an insurance company for an interview, but I have not won any awards. | Nervous   | I. Have internship experience in a social work organisation and | It turns out that I have numerous advantages; why haven't I |

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|   |   |             | independent project;<br>2. Similar to psychology, and obtained third-level qualification of psychological counsellor;<br>3. Strong learning ability, but also easy to learn. As a liberal arts student, I independently learned PS, love editing and other computer software production. | discovered it before? Although I still feel a little lack of confidence, I am no longer afraid and have considerable confidence.  |
| B | Internship in a social work organisation; I feel that I have been over-working, but I have not received the corresponding assistance (project funds have been deducted). I do not know whether I should continue to stay in this organisation.  | Tangled     | 1. Independently declared children's public welfare sports project won 3 Supported by RMB 10,000, news about project development was reported in newspapers;<br>2. Organisations often have the opportunity to be unique and feel that they have been given numerous tasks.              | I should be grateful to the organisation for giving me numerous opportunities to make immediate progress. It can be said that no matter what unit I go to, I can begin immediately. The organisation has unreasonable aspects. If there is a chance, then I will raise it with the senior management. Do not worry about it anymore and complete the internship with peace of mind. |
| C | Results of the postgraduate entrance examination may not be very good, and I want to continue World War II, but the family situation is not good, and there are student loans.  | Persistence | 1. The postgraduate entrance examination experience allows me to understand in-depth social work theory;<br>2. The postgraduate entrance examination has made me persevering and patient;<br>3. Willing to stay in the field of social work.   | Regardless of the results of the postgraduate entrance examination, I will not give up studying social engineering graduates of the South China University of Technology. I am ready to go to Guangzhou to find a social work organisation I am interested in whilst working and preparing for research, which can combine practice and theory.                                     |
| D | Initially, I prepared for the postgraduate entrance examination but did not take the examination. Currently, I am preparing for the civil service examination in my hometown. However, I am worried about not being able to pass the examination. I want to find a job, but I do not know what job I should | Lost        | 1. Internship in the Youth Foundation, the unit leader's evaluation is good;<br>2. Have been an English tutor;<br>3. Student party member.   | Prepare for the graduation thesis and civil service examinations firstly, and consider thereafter looking for a social work agency after the results come out   |



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|   | look for.   |                     |   |  |
| E | I went to interview several institutions and were accepted. However, I do not know which one I should go to because I think the strengths of the institutions are good. Anti-drugs, integrated medical care and elderly social workers are good directions. | Difficult to choose | 1. Being admitted by several institutions at once increased personal confidence (originally thought that no one would like me);<br>2. Found that the social work organisations in Guangzhou and Zhuhai are better than Guangxi;<br>3. Family in Zhuhai. | Interviews in Zhuhai and Guangzhou have broadened my horizons and I am no longer limited to the original selection of candidates. You can negotiate with the organisation, go to a trainee for a few days, fully understand each organisation and make a decision. |

## CONCLUSION

Narrative therapy believes that people have a strong force for good and improvement, and they can become experts in solving their own problems. The application of narrative therapy to the daily ideological and political education of college students can immediately shorten the inner distance between teachers and students, help establish a positive teacher–student relationship and enable students to recognise their own emotions and obtain reflection faster. The internal growth momentum of students enables them to learn to view problems from a unique perspective, develop rich side stories and continue to enhance development of the inner self.

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