

Nourishing the Mind with Aesthetics, Cultivating Skills with a Sound Mind: Exploring the Collaborative Education Mechanism of Aesthetic Education and Mental Health in Hunan Technical Colleges

Abstract

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of the new era, technical and vocational education serves as a pivotal base for cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents, and its educational goal has shifted from mere skill instruction to the integrated cultivation of morality and skills and the all-round development of students. As an important link in the integration of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labor education, aesthetic education not only undertakes the mission of enhancing adolescents' aesthetic accomplishment, but also boasts unique value in regulating emotions, shaping personalities and alleviating psychological pressure. Based on the current situation of adolescent mental health and the practice of aesthetic education reform in technical colleges in Hunan Province, this paper explores the collaborative mechanism between aesthetic education reform and mental health promotion from three dimensions: theoretical logic, practical demand and implementation path. It proposes a coordinated development model featuring curriculum integration, cultural infiltration and institutional guarantee, which provides a theoretical reference and practical paradigm for technical colleges in Hunan Province to implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and improve the quality of talent cultivation.

Key words: Technical colleges; Aesthetic education; Adolescent mental health; Collaborative education

0. Introduction

As China's technical and vocational education enters the high-quality development stage, mental health issues among adolescent students in Hunan's technical colleges have grown increasingly prominent. The *Report on the Development of National Mental Health in China (2023-2024)* shows that 28.3% of these students have emotional problems like anxiety and depression, exceeding the average of regular university students^[1]. This is closely associated with their pressures of skill learning, career planning confusion and social recognition deviation. Meanwhile, traditional aesthetic education has long been marginalized in Hunan's technical colleges due to a single curriculum system, poor integration with professional disciplines and insufficient practical carriers, failing to fully exert its role in promoting mental health through emotional regulation, self-expression and social connection. In 2020, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the *Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era*, explicitly stating that aesthetic education should nurture people through aesthetics, edify people through beauty and cultivate foundational character with aesthetic values to boost students' physical and mental health^[2]. This policy provides a fundamental guideline for the coordinated development of aesthetic education reform and mental health promotion in Hunan's technical colleges. Exploring aesthetic education's potential in mental health promotion and building a collaborative education model of nourishing the mind with aesthetics and integrating spiritual well-being with aesthetic development can help technical colleges fulfill the task of fostering virtue through education, and realize the harmonious unification of students' skill and spiritual growth. Thus, exploring the coordinated development pathways is both a practical need to solve the mental health dilemma of adolescents in technical colleges and an inevitable choice to promote the integration of the five

educations and achieve talent cultivation goals in technical and vocational education.

1. Theoretical Logic of the Coordinated Development of Aesthetic Education and Mental Health Education in Technical Colleges

1.1 The Psychological Healing Value of Aesthetic Education: Emotional Regulation Based on Aesthetic Experience

The core of aesthetic education is to guide students to achieve emotional resonance and release through aesthetic experiences such as art appreciation, nature observation and handcraft creation. From a psychological perspective, aesthetic experience can activate the brain's pleasure centers and stimulate the secretion of neurotransmitters including dopamine and endorphins, thereby alleviating negative emotions such as anxiety and depression. For instance, when students in technical colleges engage in activities like design sketching and artistic rehearsal, they can not only hone their professional skills but also enter a state of psychological flow by focusing on the creative process, achieving physical and mental relaxation. This mechanism of nourishing the mind with aesthetics is highly aligned with the goal of emotional counseling in mental health education.

1.2 The Aesthetic Demand of Mental Health: The Aesthetic Dimension of a Sound Personality

The essence of mental health lies in the balance of an individual's psychological state and the cultivation of a sound personality, and aesthetic accomplishment constitutes a vital component of a sound personality. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory states that aesthetic needs are high-level human needs that surpass physiological and safety needs, and the fulfillment of such needs can enhance an individual's sense of self-worth and well-being^[3]. Students in technical colleges are in a critical period of personality formation; cultivating their aesthetic judgment and creative aesthetic ability through aesthetic education can help them establish positive self-cognition and strengthen their aesthetic expectations for professional life, thereby alleviating psychological anxiety caused by the pressure of skill learning and career confusion. For instance, guiding students to discover the beauty of technology and the beauty of labor through professional aesthetics courses can boost their sense of professional identity and pride, and in turn, promote their mental health.

1.3 Theoretical Foundation of Coordinated Development: Integration of the Five Educations and Holistic Education

The integration of the five educations stands as the core philosophy of education reform in the new era. As a link connecting moral, intellectual, physical and labor education, aesthetic education has an inherent synergy with mental health education. On the one hand, aesthetic education provides a carrier for nurturing people through aesthetics in mental health education, overcoming the dogmatic limitations of mental health education. On the other hand, mental health education offers a people-oriented guidance for aesthetic education, ensuring that aesthetic education does not become a superficial formality. The coordinated development of the two is essentially an organic combination of nourishing the mind with aesthetics and cultivating skills with a sound mind. It aligns with the educational goal of integrating moral and skill cultivation and pursuing all-round development in technical colleges, and embodies the educational philosophy of holistic education.

2. Practical Demands for the Coordinated Development of Aesthetic Education and Adolescent Mental Health Education

2.1 Practical Dilemmas of Adolescent Mental Health in Hunan's Technical Colleges

Students in Hunan's technical colleges are confronted with multiple pressures such as vocational skill certification, employment competition and biased social recognition, making them prone

to negative emotions including anxiety, depression and inferiority. Mental health issues among this group exhibit the characteristics of high anxiety, low self-identification, intense pressure and inadequate support, which are specifically manifested in the following aspects:

(1)The rising detection rates of high anxiety and depression reflect the generalization of mental health problems. Nearly half of the students suffer from significant feelings of inferiority, stemming from the negative social stereotypes attached to technical and vocational education (e.g., the perception that vocational school students are inferior to others). Such feelings of inferiority are closely associated with anxiety.

(2)The contradiction between academic learning and employment is prominent. 66.9% of the students regard academic learning as their primary source of pressure, and nearly six in ten lack confidence in their future employment. This highlights the disconnection between vocational education and social demands; family and social pressures further exacerbate their psychological burden, forming a vicious circle.

(3)Self-identity and psychological resilience are pressing weaknesses in urgent need of improvement. Only 29.6% of the students recognize the professional value of their majors, and a mere 30% hold positive expectations for their future career development. Some students have slipped into a state of resignation, which underscores the current situation in technical and vocational education where excessive emphasis is placed on technical skills at the expense of all-round development.

2.2 Existing Problems in the Coordinated Development of Aesthetic Education and Mental Health Education in Hunan's Technical Colleges

(1)Disunified educational goals

Documents on aesthetic education reform emphasize nurturing people through aesthetics, while mental health policies focus on intervention for psychological problems. At the institutional level, there is a lack of integrated goals for developmental mental health promotion and aesthetic accomplishment improvement. In 90% of technical colleges in Hunan, aesthetic education and mental health education are managed by different departments: aesthetic education falls under the jurisdiction of the Academic Affairs Office, and mental health education is the responsibility of the Student Affairs Office. Psychological counseling centers and aesthetic education venues also operate independently, with no collaborative goals, unified evaluation criteria or regular communication mechanisms between relevant departments. In terms of resource integration and utilization, the professional competence of teaching staff is evidently inadequate: only 10% of aesthetic education teachers have received mental health training, and merely 12% of mental health teachers are capable of designing artistic activities, making it difficult to implement interdisciplinary cooperation projects.

(2)Inadequate Student Perception and Participation

Survey feedback indicates that students desire practical aesthetic education with psychological support functions: 70% of them expect aesthetic education to be integrated with professional disciplines to enhance their employability, rather than being limited to pure artistic skill training; 65% believe aesthetic education should help alleviate pressure and boost self-confidence, yet such functions are rarely reflected in actual courses. Although students hope that aesthetic education can relieve psychological pressure, low participation in relevant activities is caused by poor promotion, scheduling conflicts and a monotonous format. Student satisfaction shows a distinct polarization: among students who participate in collaborative activities, 68% give positive reviews, while non-participants have little knowledge of the value of such collaboration, with only 22% having a slight understanding of it.

(3) Difficulty in Quantifying Effect Evaluation

The evaluation and assessment indicators are relatively simplistic: aesthetic education is often evaluated by the number of activities held and awards won, while mental health education is assessed by the incidence of crisis events, with a lack of quantifiable indicators for the coordinated improvement of aesthetic accomplishment and psychological resilience. Furthermore, no technical colleges in Hunan have established students' aesthetic and psychological growth archives, making it impossible to track the long-term effects of collaborative intervention.

2.3 Practical Significance of the Coordinated Development of Aesthetic Education and Mental Health Education

In response to the aforementioned predicaments, actively promoting the coordinated development of aesthetic education and mental health education holds profound practical significance.

Firstly, it can enrich the carriers of mental health education and alleviate students' emotional problems by nourishing the mind with aesthetics. Secondly, it can enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of aesthetic education by integrating it with students' psychological needs and professional development. Finally, it can optimize the educational environment of technical colleges in Hunan, foster a holistic education atmosphere featuring the nourishment of the mind with aesthetics and the cultivation of skills with a sound mind, and thus help students grow into high-quality technical and skilled talents with proficient skills, sound mental health and all-round attainments.

3. Practical Paths for the Coordinated Development of Aesthetic Education and Mental Health Education in Hunan's Technical Colleges

3.1 Construct an Integrated Curriculum System of Aesthetic Education plus Mental Health

(1) Clarify the teaching philosophy of integration and coordination

Explicitly and proactively incorporate a goal dimension encompassing mental health promotion into the goal-setting of aesthetic education reform, such as improving emotional management capabilities, enhancing self-identity and self-confidence, relieving stress and anxiety, improving interpersonal relationships, fostering a positive mindset, and boosting resilience. The goals of the two are not isolated; instead, they collaboratively serve the ultimate objective of fostering students' all-round development and the cultivation of a sound personality. School management, teaching teams and even students must reach a broad consensus on the value of aesthetic education in promoting mental health, and take this as the starting point and ultimate goal for curriculum design and implementation.

(2) Design Curriculum Activities with a Healing Orientation

Curriculum activities should be closely linked to students' real-life experiences, vocational characteristics, emotional needs and psychological development—such as identity recognition, stress coping, interpersonal relationships and anxiety about the future—and their content, forms and processes should facilitate students' emotional expression, self-exploration, stress release and positive experiences. Students are encouraged to engage in authentic self-expression and emotional catharsis through artistic media including painting, music, dance, drama, handicrafts and digital art. Emphasis should be placed on the inherent value of the process of participating in creation, experience and interaction, with focus on students' emotional experiences, dedicated engagement, stress release and sense of accomplishment during the process, rather than merely pursuing the perfection of the final works or exquisite technical skills.

(3) Innovate Curriculum Teaching Methods

Adopt experiential teaching that focuses on internal experiences to guide students to pay attention

to their physical sensations, emotional changes and inner associations during the creative process. Promote the integration of teaching, learning, practice and education through project-based learning by designing meaningful, interdisciplinary projects that solve practical problems or complete real-world tasks. These projects facilitate students' collaboration, communication and problem-solving abilities, and help them gain a sense of accomplishment and self-worth—processes that themselves significantly boost mental health. Integrate aesthetic education content with students' professional learning, future vocational scenarios and professional literacy in a sophisticated way in light of vocational characteristics, such as humanistic care in nursing, aesthetics in industrial design, and communication and expression in the service industry, so as to enhance the sense of meaning and practicality of learning.

(4) Strengthen In-depth Collaboration of the Interdisciplinary Teaching Team

Barriers should be broken down between aesthetic education teachers, mental health education instructors and psychological consultants to establish a regular and institutionalized mechanism for communication, collaboration and joint teaching research. The two parties can jointly design integrated courses or themed activities, and provide mutual support, observation and feedback during the implementation process. For example, mental health teachers can conduct non-interventional observations in aesthetic education classrooms, offering professional insights into students' states for aesthetic education teachers; aesthetic education teachers can also provide artistic resources and activity suggestions for mental health teachers. Technical colleges can regularly organize teachers to participate in special training on the integration of aesthetic education and mental health education, and invite experts and professors to explain the psychological healing value of aesthetic education and the aesthetic-oriented approaches to mental health education, so as to enhance teachers' competence in collaborative education^[4].

3.2 Foster a Campus Atmosphere of Nourishing the Mind with Aesthetics and Cultivating Skills with a Sound Mind

(1) Optimize the Campus Environment and Cultural Influence

Create an aesthetic, inclusive, safe and supportive physical campus environment and cultural atmosphere where the nurturing of aesthetic education can be felt everywhere. For example, build an aesthetic education corridor on campus and integrate students' artistic works into the campus layout to enhance their sense of belonging and self-worth; set up aesthetic corners in teaching buildings and dormitory buildings with green plants and artworks to create a warm and comfortable environment, alleviating students' academic and living pressure.

(2) Enrich Campus Aesthetic and Cultural Activities

Organize distinctive events such as the Campus Culture and Art Festival and the Vocational Aesthetics Festival, integrating aesthetic education, mental health education and professional learning into campus cultural life. For example, hold vocational image design competitions to guide students to value the beauty of vocational etiquette and personal image, while enhancing their sense of self-identity through participation; organize mental health-themed art exhibitions to display students' artistic works centered on emotional regulation, setback coping and positive mindsets, conveying uplifting psychological energy.

3.3 Establish a Safeguard Mechanism for Collaborative Education and Diversified Evaluation

(1) Improve the Resource Guarantee Mechanism

Increase resource investment in aesthetic education and mental health education, allocate professional aesthetic education teachers and psychological consultants, and build well-equipped aesthetic education practice platforms and mental health service facilities. Integrate art education and mental health education resources, student association resources and professional department

resources effectively within the campus; proactively introduce social resources outside the campus, such as local cultural centers, inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, art therapists, community organizations and relevant enterprises that provide real projects or internship opportunities, and bring in high-quality aesthetic education and mental health education resources to underpin the coordinated development.

(2) Establish a Diversified Evaluation System

Establish a diversified evaluation system combining aesthetic accomplishment and mental health status, adopting an integrated approach of formative assessment plus summative assessment and quantitative evaluation plus qualitative evaluation^[5]. Focus on the dimension of psychological growth, and incorporate mental health promotion indicators such as students' emotional engagement, attitude changes, behavioral improvements, stress relief, self-confidence enhancement and social interaction progress during their participation into the evaluation system. For example, comprehensively assess students' level of aesthetic accomplishment and mental health through aesthetic experience journals, artistic work analysis and mental health scales.

4. Conclusion and Prospect

In the future, technical colleges in Hunan should further deepen their understanding of the coordinated development of aesthetic education and mental health education, continuously innovate the paths and methods for such coordination, and strengthen theoretical research and practical exploration of collaborative education. Meanwhile, they should actively seek support from the government, society and families, and construct a comprehensive framework for collaborative education integrating schools, families and society, so as to create a sound environment for the all-round development of young students in Hunan's technical colleges. It is believed that through the coordinated development of aesthetic education reform and mental health promotion, technical colleges in Hunan will cultivate more high-caliber technical and skilled talents of the new era with proficient professional skills, sound mental health and all-round attainments, thus providing strong support for the development of China's manufacturing power and the real economy.

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