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## The Creation of Meaningful Situation: Study of Life Education Mode for Undergraduate Seed Teachers

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### Abstract

As members of the first generation of universities seed teachers under the Project “Beyond 5.12” with life education, the authors discuss in this paper the creation of an educational situation on the basis of the situated cognition theory and the situational education mode, expecting that the second generation of undergraduate seed teachers can truly accept and agree with the idea of life education and promote their self-growth. Compared with the initial mode of the project, the current meaningful situation mode changes the roles, tasks and approaches of teachers and students, so that students’ subjectivity is strengthened and students can be better connected with others during the whole process. The present mode creates the meaning situation of life education and receives positive feedback from students.

**Key words:** Life education; Meaning situation; Subjectivity; Companion

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### INTRODUCTION

Life education is the united and integrated life value orientation. It explores and seeks for the human’s

existence in the modern society where people feel alienated, anxious and indifferent, and guides the solitary individuals to be connected with their egos, others, the environment and the ultimate life.

With the arrival of the modern society and the widespread application of technology, tall buildings, machinery mass manufacture and rough cultural production have separated people from the rest world. The fundamental values of humans are measured by materialized indexes, and “alienation” swallows human’s existence (Rollo, 2008a). Undergraduates in present Chinese colleges are filled with strong self awareness, yearning for the perfect integration of individual potential and external values. They show bewilderment and anxiety when pursuing the social materialized values in the current times, and they form the typical group who believe life meaningless because of being ignored and unknown.

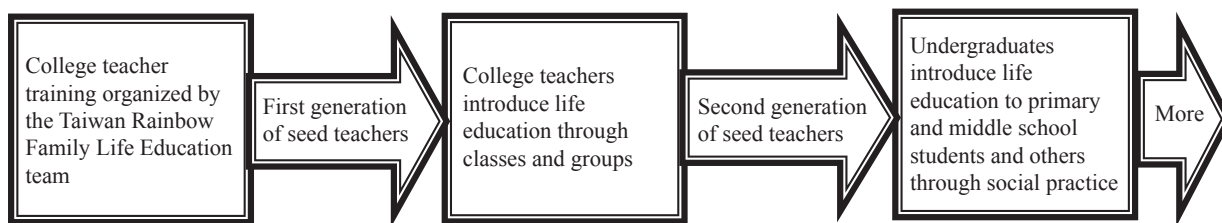
This paper is a teaching mode adjustment case study of southwest university when they implementing life education. At the beginning they adopt a teaching and learning mode, which did not evoke students’ subjectivity. Then, they developed and adopted meaningful situation mode, in which students enjoy more spontaneity and autonomy. After comparing two modes, this paper found that meaningful situation mode made students experience and accept the core idea of life education, and left more significant effects on students.

### 1. SOUTHWEST UNIVERSITY AND LIFE EDUCATION

“Beyond 5.12” is a service project launched in Sichuan. It is implemented by Professor Huo Xiaoling together with her professional team of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University under the financial support of the Hong Kong Keswick Foundation. Professor Huo Xiaoling cooperates with Taiwan Rainbow Family Life Education Association to introduce the course *Spring Sowing and Life Education*.

At the later stage of the project, she also introduces life education to six universities in Sichuan and Chongqing, hoping that the 14 seed teachers in those universality can introduce the idea by means of growth groups to the

undergraduates, who are expected to spread life education through social practice to the local primary schools, middle schools and other fields, just as a dandelion spreads the seeds of life education (Huo, 2011).



**Figure 1**  
**Life Education Development Pattern for Six Universities in Sichuan and Chongqing Under the Project “Beyond 5.12”**

## 2. LIFE EDUCATION MODE OF SOUTHWEST UNIVERSITY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROJECT

The authors of this paper are the members of seed teachers. Their university, Southwest University, is selected by professor Huo Xiaoling for the Project “Beyond 5.12”, and they become engaged in life education. After receiving the first training in Deyang city, Sichuan province in May, 2011, the university began to introduce the idea of life education to the postgraduates and undergraduates of the Social Work. At the beginning of the project, college student life education group was organized every week. The group was made up of 18 undergraduates and postgraduates of the Social Work, and guided by the seed teacher who had received the training given by Taiwan Rainbow Family Life Education Association. Before group activities, trainings on the idea of life education were provided to the group members, and during the group activities, the teacher attached great importance to sharing, encouraging team members to perceive the value of life and reflect on the meaning of human’s existence. After the group activities were completed, the undergraduates and postgraduates formed the second generation of seed teachers. Meanwhile, Southwest University also actively developed social practice bases for life education, for example, communities, primary schools, middle schools, high schools and youth activity centers. The university encouraged the second generation of seed teachers to go to the social practice bases and classrooms to fulfill the idea of life education in practice (Table 1).

Half a year later, the authors of this paper found this mode was subject to the following problems.

(a) College students were less spontaneous than expected. College students joining life education relayed too much on teachers. Without teachers’ supervision, students were less motivated to continue the project.

(b) Project sustainability was in question. Most students of the life education group were the first-grade postgraduates and junior undergraduates of the Social Work Profession. After the trainings and social practice, postgraduates went for professional practice while postgraduates were busy with finding a job or preparing for postgraduate program. So they could no longer be fully engaged in the project, let alone thoroughly understand the value of life education. However, training a new group of students required additional time and effort, while the service objects were in needs of consistent care.

(c) Students only had limited practice opportunities. Life education emphasizes the experiential learning, and students can deepen their understanding of the idea through each practice. However, the development mode mentioned above provided only one chance of practice, and students could not fully integrate their experiences and emotions.

(d) Students did not rethink profoundly. This had something to do with the real practice and also with teachers’ understanding of the course. Though different individuals held different understandings of life, the exchange of ideas within the group were influenced by the leading teacher. Even though team work emphasized the participation of team members, the leadership of the teacher still limited the communication in the group.

**Table 1**  
**Life Education Mode of Southwest University at the Beginning of the Project**

Life education mode at the beginning of the project	
	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <b>First generation of seed teachers</b> (college teachers)                 </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <b>Second generation of seed teachers</b> (undergraduates and postgraduates)                 </div> </div>
Goals	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;">                     Introduce students the idea and methods of life education, and to equip students with good life beliefs.                 </div> <div style="width: 45%;">                     Learn the idea and methods of life education, and apply them to primary and middle school teaching.                 </div> </div>

To be continued

Continued

<b>Life education mode at the beginning of the project</b>	
Roles	<p><i>Passer</i>: to pass the knowledge, skills and values of life education to the second generation of seed teachers;  <i>Leader</i>: to lead the growth group;  <i>Supervisor</i>: to supervise the practice of the second generation of seed teachers;  <i>Organizer</i>: to organize the progress of life education.</p> <p><i>Receiver</i>: to receive the idea, knowledge and skills of life education from teachers;  <i>Group member</i>: member of the college student growth group;  <i>Practicer</i>: to pass life education to primary and middle school students through classroom teaching;  <i>Participant</i>: to prepare for and participate in the project actively.</p>
Methods	<p>Lead the college student growth group, supervise their practice and encourage them to rethink after practice.</p> <p>Join in the college student growth group and pass the idea of life education to primary and middle school students after group training.</p>

In sum, the mode did not fully explore the subjectivity of college students. Meanwhile, in response to the fundamental idea of life education, it failed to create a good interpersonal situation which enabled students to understand and respond to such philosophical propositions as individual existence, self and interpersonal, self and environment, as well as self and the meaning of life in interpersonal communication and event situation.

### 3. SITUATED COGNITION THEORY AND SITUATIONAL COGNITIVE TEACHING MODE

Situation is an interactive strength linked with emotions within a group. It is the modern and dominant environment factor with varied manifestations determined by the remaining of the past and the expectations for the future (Xiao, 2000). The situated cognition theory is an important learning theory formed in the mid and late 1980s. According to the theory, learning in nature is the product of the interaction between learners and situations, and it is deeply influenced by activities, social ties and the culture. It reflects learners' participation in the practice and the interaction with others and the environment. It is the process in which an individual develops practical abilities and improves the social level (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). According to the situated cognition theory, learning should be of the following five characteristics. First, situationality. As a necessary condition for learning, a situation functions as a clue guidance which contributes to the reserves of knowledge. Second, reality. Learning should be put into real situations, including both physical and cognitive realities. Third, practicalness. Learners should take initiative to the practice related to their professional fields, rather than just learning from the experience given by teachers or others. Fourth, exploration. Learning environment should provide learners the right to explore. That is to say, learners should have the rights to face difficulties and to strive for solutions in difficult situations. Fifth, initiative. Learning should trigger learners' motivation for initiative learning, and provide learners with diversified learning resources

(Jonathan, 2002).

Situational learning advocates the connection between human's cognitive activities and cultural ties, emphasizing students should conduct cognitive learning through real or simulated situations (Xu & Cheng, 2010, p.46). An educational situation should provide individuals with "cultural, spiritual, psychological, inner, and subjective" experience, atmosphere and interpersonal interaction, so as to promote individual changes. Situational cognitive teaching mode has the following features (Liu & Gao, 2010):

First, problem-based constructive learning. In the process of learning, complex and meaningful problem situations are set up for learners to find out solutions cooperatively, so that learners can take the initiative to construct the knowledge related to the problems, master various skills to solve the problems and form the independent learning ability. Constructive learning advocates that learning should be the process in which learners make use of their experience and actively construct the internal mental representation in their own ways.

Second, abundant meaningful situation sources. As the core factor of situational cognitive teaching mode, situations can be physical, natural, functional and virtual. Abundant situation sources can not only reflect the application of knowledge in real life and keep the complexity of the real life, but also provide learners with information sources that trigger different ideas and form the reduced "situation collection", thus labeling the educational mode with the feature of "situationality".

Third, learner-oriented learning environment. The existing experience and background knowledge are the basis of meaningful learning. Learners actively conduct meaning construction and stand at the centre of the learning environment.

Four, supporting function of teachers. The supports of teachers can help learners pass through "the zone of proximal development" successfully and obtain further development. Under the support of teachers, learners take over learning management from teachers and become gradually independent of the teachers.

#### 4. CREATION OF MEANINGFUL SITUATION MODE FOR LIFE EDUCATION

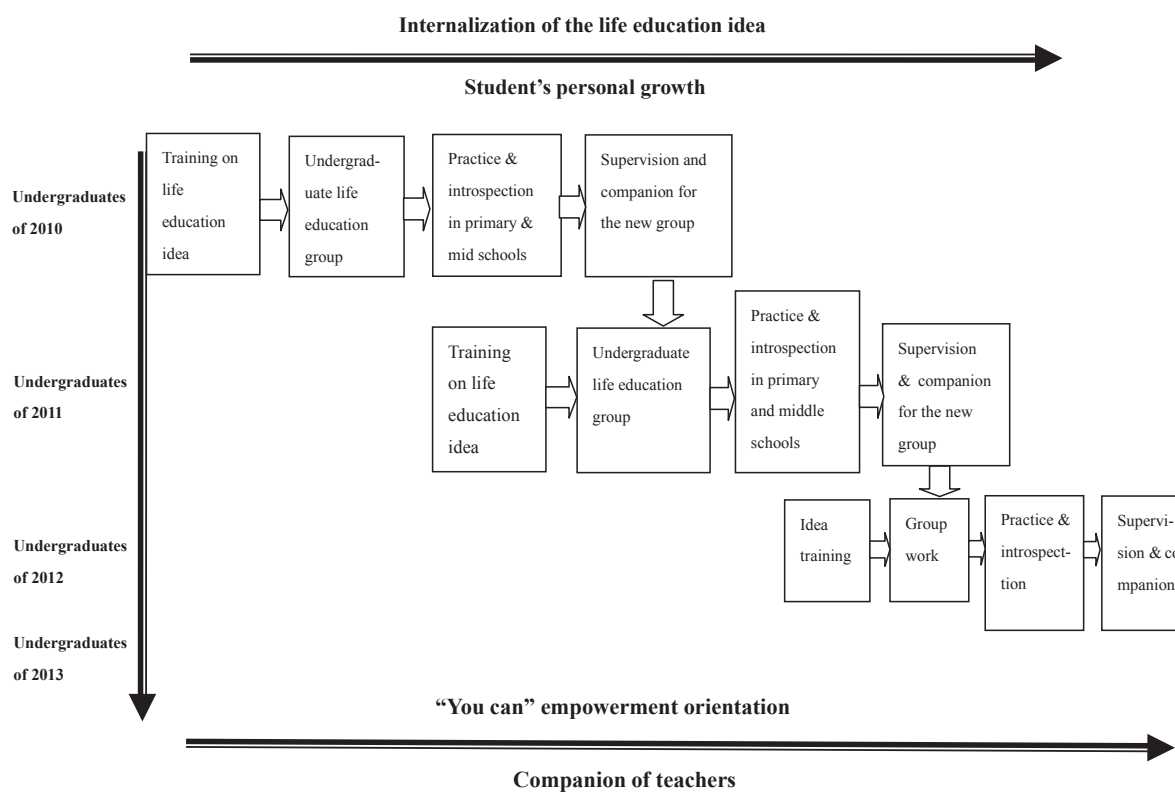
Inspired by the situated cognition theory and the situational education mode, the authors believe that a meaning situation should also be created for life education. In the meaning situation, each individual can experience the respect for life, the understanding of human's value, different definitions for life meaning, the belief of subjectivity and the happiness brought by the connection with others and the environment. The meaning situation prompts individuals to rethink the ultimate propositions of life, to seek the harmony with nature and to create new scenery of life. Therefore, the authors restate the idea of life education and newly design the educational situation. Six months after the beginning of the project, Southwest University applied the new life education mode, in which teachers changed their roles from the organizers to the assistants so as to significantly develop the subjectivity of students.

The meaning situation mode for life education has the following features (Table 2).

First, students are the major part of life education. During the whole process of group activity, teachers no longer play the role of team leader. Instead, students themselves are in charge of the activity, while teachers only give proper supervision. Teachers join in the group only after team sharing and discussion, and summarize the theme, purpose and working techniques of the group.

Second, each student will have at least three life education experiences. The first one is the training of life education provided by teachers. The second one is the leadership of the students in the college student group. The third one is the service practice of the students in primary and middle schools. The fourth one is the supervision of the students for the new life education group. Students will rethink the activity after each practice, and the newly gained experience will deepen their understanding of life education and promote their personal growth.

positive belief "I can", and urge them to shoulder the responsibility of life education.



**Figure 2**  
**Meaning Situation Mode for Life Education In Southwest University**

Fourth, good life education situation is created. Connection with the outside world is an essential part of life meaning. In this situation, college students learn to face and express themselves and exchange ideas within the group. In practice, they devote themselves, affect and change others with their own life. When directing younger

schoolmates, they shoulder the responsibility of teachers and act as "experiencer", "supervisor" and "companion". They also bear the duty of course inheritance, and strive to improve their self-worth and life energy during the process. The situation composed of teachers' and schoolmates' constant practice, introspection and sharing



provides students will courage, confidence, responsibility, mission, love, creation and other life elements, which will become the inexhaustible power of their life.

Fifth, teachers accompany the group all the way. Teachers are not the main part of life education, but their company during the whole process is essential for

students. The teachers' support can be found in each group activity and practice, in the communication with students and special attention to some group members, and in their confidence in the students and respect for life. When others keep telling them the idea and value of life education, students will be affected changed.

**Table 2**  
**Current Meaning Situation Mode for Life Education in Southwest University (S&C: supervision & companion)**

	First generation of seed teachers (universities teachers) <b>S &amp; C</b> →	Second generation of seed teachers (undergraduates and postgraduates) <b>S &amp; C</b> →	Third generation of seed teachers (undergraduates and postgraduates)
Goals	Introduce to students the idea and methods of life education, create good life education situation through students' practice and "supervision" and teachers' company, so as to make students better understand life education.	Receive the first training on life education idea and methods, organize group activities and class practice, "supervise" new seed teachers, and experience the meaning of life in the meaning situation.	Similar to the second generation of seed teachers, receive the training on life education, act as group worker, practicer, supervisor and companion, promote self-growth under the company of other schoolmates.
Main roles	<i>Passer</i> : pass the knowledge, skills and values of life education to every generation of seed teachers; <i>Supervisor</i> : supervise group practice and primary & middle school practice of seed teachers, solve students' puzzlement; <i>Companion</i> : provide company, care and encourage for seed teachers in learning and practice. <i>Enabler</i> : create meaning situation, stimulate students' subjectivity, encourage students to discover the meaning of life through self-exploration and practice.	<i>Group leader</i> : lead the life education group, being the first life education practice; <i>Class practicer</i> : pass life education to primary & middle school students through classroom teaching, being the second life education practice; <i>Supervisor</i> : supervise new seed teachers and share experience with them, being the third life education practice; <i>Companion</i> : accompany new seed teachers and experience life responsibility and meaning.	Similar to the second generation of seed teachers, the third generation of seed teachers should play the roles of <i>group leader</i> , <i>class practicer</i> , <i>supervisor and companion</i> of the fourth generation of seed teachers. <i>The accompanied</i> : different from second generation of seed teachers, their companions include not only the official teachers (first generation of seed teachers), but also their older schoolmates (second generation of seed teachers), so they can better accept and experience life education through daily communication.
Methods	Do not join in group activity and class discussion, communicate with students before practice, accompany and encourage students during practice, exchange ideas with them after practice.	Encourage students to take the initiative, deepen students' understanding of life and promote their growth through the first round of group activities, the second round of class practice and the third round of supervision for new seed teachers.	Apart from those similar to the second generation of seed teachers, they are accompanied by the first and the second generations of seed teachers, so as to gain more abundant emotional and physical experiences.

## 5. REFLECTION AND EFFECTS OF MEANING SITUATION MODE

To overcome the alienation and coldness of the modern society, individuals can get connected with the ego world, the interpersonal world, the natural world and the ultimate world of life. Through the connection, they can be integrated with the world to experience the meaning of existence, and realize the greatest potential by using the free will in the game between fate and freedom (Rollo, 2008b). Life education can not only arouse people's respect and cherishing for life, but also make them build an outstanding belief to enjoy the nurturing and breeding of life.

Compared with the life education mode at the beginning of the project, meaning situation mode creates a better environment for life education. With the influence of life education idea, the baptism of practice, the enforcement of supervision and company, students accept

and internalize a firm faith of life. They become more aware of themselves and others, and better experience the uniqueness and value of life. And this is the exact way of life growth.

Six months after the first application of meaning situation mode, both the new and the old teams have basically taken shape, and the project can be developed sustainably. Meanwhile, those students who join in life education get a strong sense of identity on the project. They become more confident, willing to make efforts and take responsibility, and they can remain calm in face of pressure and setbacks. All these can be seen in the reflections of the second generation of seed teachers. For instance, one student said that "life education opens my heart, and I become willing to share with others. I tolerate and respect others more. Life education is also the education of love, guiding us to know ourselves and others with love".

Another student wrote that "It is not easy to change a person's heart. It needs time and patience. But life

education makes it, giving me positive changes at the bottom of my heart”.

One girl wrote that “Trainings of life education seem to solve many of my puzzlements and lead me out of the troubles. After each practice activity of life education, I gain a new point of view towards the people around. I treat others with a sincere heart, as if I am filled with all positive energy”.

A student sent a message to the teacher after the course of life education, saying that “although time still goes on day by day, I feel energetic after each course of life education, and my life is filled with hope. It is a miracle”.

Life education teams of Southwest University will continue the meaning situation mode. However, there are some questions waiting to be answered. For example, how to evaluate the student’s growth under this mode? How to define the help and support of the students who act as supervisors and companions for the next generation of seed teachers? And what are the effects? While accompanying the new seed teachers, how should the older seed teachers supervise them? In short, life education has taken root in the universities of Sichuan and Chongqing, and it will continue to develop and grow. Besides, an increasing number of seed teachers will join in the course, delivering the outstanding belief of life, affecting and moving others with their own lives.

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