

# The application and exploration of horticultural therapy model in life education for college students

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**Abstract:** Horticultural therapy is a therapeutic approach that promotes physical and mental well-being through the interaction between plants and the natural environment. It has been widely used in the field of mental health. This paper examines the use of horticultural therapy in life education for college students. To start, the current state of life education for college students is presented. Then, the potential role of horticultural therapy in life education for college students is discussed. Following this, specific recommendations are made for the establishment of a horticultural therapy model for life education among college students. Finally, the advantages and limitations of using a horticultural therapy model to promote life education among college students are summarized based on case studies, and future research directions are discussed.

**Keywords:** horticultural therapy; college students; life education; mental health; application and exploration

## 1. Introduction

Horticultural therapy promotes physical and mental health by utilizing the interaction between plants and the natural environment. Originating in the West, horticultural therapy was first proposed in 1699 and gradually developed into an independent discipline. The field of horticultural therapy has undergone numerous attempts and innovations over several centuries. Horticultural therapy was initially used primarily for individuals with mental and psychological disorders, but has now expanded to include the physical and mental care of the elderly and disabled. More recently, the application of horticultural therapy has been expanded to include emotional regulation, improvement of physical and mental health, and skill training for adolescents, sub-healthy individuals, and healthy individuals.

Horticultural therapy improves mental health, reduces stress and anxiety, enhances self-esteem and self-confidence, and promotes holistic development of the mind and body through plant cultivation, maintenance, observation, and interaction with the natural environment[1,2]. University students are a unique demographic facing numerous pressures, including academic stress, interpersonal relationship issues, and career planning. They should have the ability to overcome challenges and hardships, along with a constructive outlook on life and a deep understanding of its complexities. The application and exploration of horticultural therapy models in university student life education offer new opportunities for learning and growth.

This paper explores the role of horticultural therapy in life education for college students and proposes a horticultural therapy model for their life education. The advantages and limitations of the horticultural therapy model in college students' life education will be discussed in detail through the analysis and summary of practical cases. Additionally, prospects for future research will be provided.

## 2. Current Situation of Life Education for College Students

China entered the initial stage of life education in the 1990s. The primary goal of life education for college students was to teach them about protecting and respecting life. However, life education's content has now expanded to cover a broader range of topics. As post-2000 college students enter campuses, they face increasingly prominent psychological issues such as anxiety in interpersonal relationships and decreased resilience. In September 2016, the "Core Literacy of Student Development in China" was released, proposing that students comprehend the meaning and value of life, regulate and manage emotions, and possess resilience. Life education aims to cultivate college students' awareness of life, values, and skills, as well as enhance their self-management abilities. However, there are several problems with life education for college students at present.

To begin with, the educational system has its imperfections. Education for life skills in colleges has a lower status compared to other courses. It lacks comprehensive and systematic approaches. Courses on life education are typically included as part of mental health courses, and they have inadequate course offerings and incomplete teaching resources. There is a need for further improvement to ensure that students can comprehensively learn and master important knowledge and skills related to life.

Secondly, the teaching models and methods are monotonous. The teaching models and methods of life education for college students are relatively monotonous, mainly consisting of mental health courses, themed class meetings, and promotional activities. They lack practical components and personalized teaching methods. This monotonous teaching model makes it difficult to stimulate students' interest in learning and cultivate their practical abilities.

Thirdly, there is a lack of practical components and opportunities for experiential learning. College students' life education lacks practical components and experiential learning. Students receive knowledge and information passively, without adequate opportunities for active participation and practice.

## 3. The Potential Role of Horticultural Therapy in College Students' Life Education.

The horticultural therapy model has several potential roles in the life education of college students. First, it provides practical and experiential learning opportunities, cultivating practical and innovative skills. Second, it promotes life awareness and values, helping college students to develop a correct outlook on life and values. Third, it promotes the harmonious development of mind and body, enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence, reducing stress and anxiety, and improving emotional and psychological well-being[4,5].

#### **4. Establishing a Horticultural Therapy Model for College Students' Life Education**

Horticultural therapy is a practical and experiential activity in college students' life education that can meet the psychological needs of contemporary college students. The following are specific suggestions for establishing a horticultural therapy model for life education:

1. Strengthen the curriculum design of life education. Optional courses on life education can be offered by integrating the practical experience of horticultural therapy. Through theoretical learning and practical operation, college students can cultivate plants, experience life, care for life, and thus understand the meaning of life and improve their sense of the meaning of life.

2. Provide diversified approaches to education. Life education can be conducted through various methods, such as lectures, salons, and practical activities, to stimulate students' interest and enhance their participation. For example, taking advantage of the "5.25" students' mental health day, thematic activities based on horticultural therapy for life education can be organized, such as plant adoption, plant sowing, and hydroponic plant production. By participating in the growth process of plants, college students can learn about the wonders and preciousness of life and cultivate respect and care for life.

3. Integrate psychological counseling with horticultural therapy. By combining psychological counseling with horticultural therapy, college students can receive comprehensive support. Psychologists can guide college students to explore their inner world through horticultural therapy, help them understand their feelings and needs, and relieve stress and anxiety. In particular, group counseling activities based on horticultural therapy can be conducted for individuals with mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and Internet gaming addiction.

4. Increase hands-on opportunities. Collaborate with botanical gardens or farms to establish practical bases for horticultural therapy, providing students with a real horticultural environment where they can actively participate in the process of planting and caring for plants. Through communication and cooperation with people of different ages and backgrounds, students can have a deeper experience of the diversity of life and interdependence, and cultivate a sense of social responsibility and team spirit.

5. Conduct research and practical projects on horticultural therapy. To cooperate with experts and institutions in related fields to explore the role and effectiveness of horticultural therapy in life education through interdisciplinary cooperation in psychology, education and other disciplines, and to provide scientific evidence for its promotion in educational practice.

In conclusion, establishing a horticultural therapy model for life education requires research and practice from various aspects, including strengthening curriculum design, providing diversified educational approaches, integrating psychological counseling, increasing practical opportunities, and conducting research projects. These efforts can help college students understand and respect life, improve their mental health, and cultivate emotional expression skills and social responsibility.

#### **5. Advantages and Limitations of Horticultural Therapy Model**

A university in northern Israel has implemented a horticultural therapy model where young adults are invited to create and maintain glass ecological bottles. According to surveys, students perceive this activity to have a positive impact on their physical and mental health while fostering their sense of responsibility, patience and emotional management abilities, as well as enhancing creativity and cognitive skills. This practical experience enriches students' understanding of life and fosters a passion for living. A study conducted among university students in Chengdu, China combined horticultural therapy with social work to create a model of horticultural group. According to the results, horticultural therapy enhances cognitive understanding through sensory experiences. Furthermore, group collaboration deepens life experiences, creates connections with other life forms, and enhances the sense of meaning in life. The horticultural therapy model in college students' life education provides numerous benefits, such as practical and experiential learning opportunities, cultivation of practical and innovative abilities, development of life awareness and values, improvement of self-awareness and management abilities, holistic development of body and mind, stress relief, and enhancement of emotional and psychological well-being. Nevertheless, the horticultural therapy model has limitations, such as the necessity for teaching resource support, professional guidance and counseling of horticultural therapists, and the lack of an effective evaluation system. To overcome these limitations, it is necessary to establish a scientific, objective, and actionable evaluation system for life education. This will help us better understand the impact and effectiveness of horticultural therapy on college students' life education.

#### **6. Future Research Directions**

There are many future research directions worth exploring for the application and implementation of horticultural therapy models in life education for college students. Further research can be conducted to examine the impact mechanisms of horticultural therapy models on the mental health of college students, as well as to evaluate their effectiveness. One can also explore the application and evaluation of horticultural therapy models in various disciplines and majors. Moreover, one can study the adaptability and feasibility of horticultural therapy models in different cultural and social contexts.

#### **7. Conclusion**

The models of horticultural therapy have substantial potential and exploratory value in college students' life education. Horticultural therapy allows for the cultivation of practical and innovative abilities, providing students with opportunities for experiential and hands-on learning. Moreover, horticultural therapy contributes to the development of life awareness and values, enhancing self-awareness and self-management skills of college students. Nevertheless, certain limitations exist in the implementation of horticultural therapy in college students' life education, demanding further research and exploration. Future research can concentrate on the mechanisms of influence, effect evaluation, disciplinary applications, and cross-cultural adaptation, providing more support for the development of life education for college students.

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