

Original Paper

Telling the Stories of Teachers in the New Era: The Symbiotic Relationship between Educational Integrity and Spiritual Nurturing

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Abstract

The wisdom of educating people by enlightening minds and addressing individual needs is an important aspect of educators' spirit. This paper explores teachers' educational wisdom through textual analysis and grounded theory. It examines how teachers' personality and educational qualities profoundly influence students. Analysis reveals that five key educational qualities—having effective teaching and management methods, encouraging and affirming students, showing trust and praise, having a passion for education and a sense of responsibility, and being strict yet understanding and supportive of students—can nurture students' minds and enrich the relationship between teachers and students. This, in turn, helps students grow and succeed.

Keywords

Teachers, the spirit of educators, educational character, spiritual nourishment, coexistence, shared presence

1. Introduction

In September 2023, General Secretary Xi Jinping wrote a letter to representatives of outstanding teachers across the country, urging educators to "vigorously promote the spirit of an educator" and profoundly elaborated on the connotation of the "unique spirit of an educator in China," pointing the way for the construction of teacher teams in the new era. The General Secretary pointed out that the wisdom of nurturing students with knowledge and hearts, and teaching according to aptitude, is an important embodiment of the spirit of an educator. A person's growth is accompanied by a teacher's presence, and

over the course of a decade or more of schooling, teachers' unique personal charm always influences and inspires students. To explore the wisdom of educators in nurturing students, the personal charm and educational character of teachers, and their profound influence on students, to identify which educational qualities nourish students' hearts and help them grow and succeed, and to uncover the mysteries behind this through mediating effects. Teaching in any subject is not just about enabling students to acquire certain knowledge, skills, and abilities in that subject, but also about simultaneously fostering and enhancing their spirit, thoughts, emotions, ways of thinking, lifestyles, and values. All of this depends on highly principled teachers who possess educational sentiments, moral cultivation, and personal qualities" (Huang, 2019). Confucius once said: "When a person is upright, orders are unnecessary; they will be followed." "If one's own conduct is not upright, no commands will be obeyed." Zhang Zai, a thinker from the Song Dynasty, also believed that "teaching is extremely difficult. It is necessary to fully utilize each person's talents in order not to mislead them. One should demonstrate what can be achieved through observation before explaining anything." Simone Weil, a famous French philosopher, described the ideal teacher as someone who enlightens students' intellectual potential, who remains in the background during educational processes, and who serves as a wise guide throughout the process of personal growth. She believed that, beyond imparting knowledge and skills, education should also focus on developing students' empathy and ability to understand others' perspectives. This, in turn, enriches students' personalities and spiritual development (Xu, 2018). In educational activities that are full of creativity and vitality, teachers should act as facilitators, allowing students to take the initiative in their own learning. They should also provide unconditional support and care, acting as wise guides who accompany students on their journey of growth (Lin & Hong, 2008).

2. Method

2.1 Sources of Research Data

The raw data for this study came from two sources. One was interviews with 25 college students. The questions asked were: "On your academic journey, which teacher left the deepest impression on you? What qualities of this teacher influenced you?" The second question was: "Have you ever encountered teachers who were irresponsible?" Through these interviews, we tried to understand what personality traits students valued most in their teachers, and how teachers' educational wisdom played a role in student development.

Another source of information comes from news reports about teachers published in People's Daily and Guangming Daily. Using the keyword "teacher" in the newspaper search function of CNKI, 17 news articles about individual teachers from People's Daily and Guangming Daily over the past 10 years were selected. Articles referring to teachers as part of a group were excluded. Only those stories and topics selected by authoritative party journalists from a journalistic and narrative perspective were considered. From these original articles, we tried to identify the personality traits of teachers who are liked by students. Reflecting its vividness and authenticity.

2.2 Grounded Theory Analysis

According to the text content, encode and decode using the Novio12 software.

Open Coding Sheet

This table is based on qualitative research methods. The original interview transcripts were subjected to open-ended coding, and the various dimensions related to students' evaluations of teachers were identified step by step.

Initial category	Initial concept	Original concept
Encourage, affirm, trust, and praise students.	Filled with affirmation, praise, and trust	Affirmation, praise, trust, encouragement, recognition, giving confidence, believing in my abilities
	Encourage, motivate, and praise.	Encouragement gives me courage, motivation, and praise. It's important to encourage me regularly and not hold back on praise.
There are methods for teaching and management.	Managing democracy doesn't solely focus on learning.	Helping people cope with setbacks, not being overly focused on grades, practicing democratic management, and emphasizing all-around development
	There are methods to teaching.	The lectures are humorous, with a variety of teaching methods, making the classes lively and interesting.
	Solid professional knowledge and a spirit of dedication	Delve into difficult problems, possess solid professional knowledge, prepare lessons carefully, and explain complex concepts in simple terms.
Devoted to the education cause with a strong sense of responsibility	Full of responsibility	Responsible, dedicated, and committed to fulfilling one's duties
	Love for the education cause	Love for work, dedication, enthusiasm, and passion
Strict standards for students' understanding	The harsh educational methods that students have to endure	Coercive education: hard to understand at the time, but feels rewarding in retrospect. Strict, but beneficial.
	Strictness that considers the students' well-being	Strict but effective, with high demands and standards
Respect, understand, and help students.	Showing concern, understanding, and helping students	Taking students to the hospital, taking care of them, being kind and approachable, showing concern for their lives, and helping them overcome difficulties
	Respect, understanding, and care	Respect students, understand them, care for them, and treat them equally.

3. Result

The 25 college students interviewed were 6 in grade 2, 12 in grade 3, and 7 in grade 4. They have encountered teachers with excellent quality and far-reaching influence on them on their way to study. Among them, 23 talked about the teacher's encouragement, carefulness, affirmation, responsibility, gentleness, and undivided attention to the students. When the students are at a low ebb, they inspire, warm and impress themselves. Two students spoke about the impressive teachers who were particularly strict with them at that time, and the learning requirements were particularly tight. One of the teachers studied the Hengshui model and arranged for the children to do morning exercises, but the children became especially grateful to the teachers after they went to college, especially understanding that the strict requirements of the teachers at that time were for their good. This is the children grow up mature, self-identity development is better, can correctly understand and understand the teacher's ideas. In the face of the second question, 18 students said that they had not encountered irresponsible teachers, and the teachers were all good. Another 7 students in the interviewee pointed out that the teacher with an auxiliary class, speaks relatively simple, do not speak particularly deep questions, feel that is not good. Another interviewer said that their math teacher was also a class teacher. If a classmate did not hand in his homework, he would punish the whole class for running three times. A said 'the teacher will because a person did not hand in the homework, punish everyone to run 3000 meters together, feel particularly bad'. Coincidentally, a social networking platform student commented that 'a university teacher was late for a classmate, remembering that everyone was late, and deducting his usual grades' This innocent liaison feeling is unacceptable to students. These two columns also show that the students' awareness of rights and responsibilities is relatively strong, and they do not want to bear the punishment caused by the responsibility of others.

Finally, it explores the methods of teaching and management, encourages trust and praise students, loves education full of responsibility, understands students strictly, respects and understands to help students. These five characteristics are loved and praised by students, which belong to the professional characteristics of teachers.

4. Discussion

4.1 *The Symbiotic Relationship between Teachers and Students*

The theory of symbiosis was first proposed by German mycologist Anton de Bary in 1879, who defined it as different organisms living closely together. Later, American biologist Lynn Margulis and others further developed this theory on the basis of the 'Gaia hypothesis', arguing that life actively forms and transforms their environment, and that the symbiosis of living organisms and new biological groups is the most important source of innovation in the evolution of the Earth (Guo, 2022). Later, it was also a close and mutually beneficial relationship formed by the interaction between two or more organisms in the social field. In this relationship, one party provides the other with help that is conducive to survival, and at the same time receives help from the other party. The two sides depend on each other and benefit

each other (Feng & Li, 2021). Teachers and students are the main body of education. Teachers play a guiding role in the process of students' growth. They are an important source of students' learning knowledge, skills, character, personality and interpersonal relationship. However, it is difficult to say that students are passive. As teachers, they are always moved by the flash points of students. Even if teachers are only regarded as a professional teacher, they will have a teacher-student relationship and interaction as actors and students in the professional process. The interaction of this relationship will more or less affect the growth of teachers. Yet, given that students are not yet fully mature in terms of both biological and psychological age, they derive greater benefits from the teacher-student interaction and the teacher-student relationship itself through the teacher's instruction. According to Thorndike's theory of learning and Bandura's behaviorist theory, teachers emulate their colleagues' knowledge, interpersonal relationships, moral character, and cognitive abilities; therefore, teaching is not merely a profession but, rather, a vocation—because teachers must sow seeds of kindness and moral integrity in the minds of immature students; this forms the foundational character of an individual throughout their life. It is equally important for teachers to understand their own growth in the symbiotic relationship and to help students grow. Confucius put forward the concept of "teaching benefits teachers as well as students" thousands of years ago. Teachers and students coexist in the field of education.

4.2 The Relationship between Teachers and Students

Professor Zhao Tingyang has made pioneering work on the theory of 'coexistence and symbiosis'. In its view, 'co-existence' takes 'co-existence' as the basic problem, and focuses on how people can better exist through specific 'doing' ways in the world created by 'co-existence', and how to achieve better 'co-existence' through the creation and change of interpersonal relationships (Qu & Liu, 2023). The co-existence relationship between teachers and students means that the theory of teacher development should be the value unity of "self-improvement" and "adulthood." The former is reflected in teachers' conscious pursuit of their professional dignity, while the latter is reflected in teachers' better practice of the mission of "educating people." The two are unified in teachers' "doing things" and "achieving things" through wise actions. Logically, a teacher's self-improvement is a prerequisite for helping students grow. It's a process of constantly striving for self-improvement and positively transforming one's own existence. It also involves teachers constantly reflecting on their educational practices through wise actions in their daily work. It is a process of enhancing the ability to nurture others. Its ultimate goal is for the individual to become a true "teacher of people." A teacher who exists and develops within a "relationship of mutual presence" is first and foremost a person with a strong sense of life. This awareness enables the teacher to carry out education with reverence for life. With great sensitivity to life, the teacher can understand the essence of education. Through self-reflection and continuous improvement in educational practices, the teacher creates more opportunities for the growth and enhancement of life's value. Secondly, a teacher is also someone who values each individual. Only by paying attention to and genuinely caring for every student can the teacher's core elements of educational love, humanistic care, wisdom, teaching methods, and practical knowledge develop properly. In this way, teachers can create more possibilities for the

flourishing of everyone's life through the enriching experience of a "relationship of mutual presence."

4.3 The Mutual Achievement Relationship between Teachers and Students

Given that teachers serve as the primary agents guiding children toward growth and development. Teachers guide students into the existing world and encourage them to consciously assume the responsibility of transforming the world; this constitutes their irreplaceable educational ethical responsibility. Furthermore, the ability to effectively resolve the contradictions arising during this process through action is crucial for fulfilling teachers' educational ethical responsibilities and for the development of the teacher as an educational subject (Qu & Liu, 2024). The development of the teacher's subjectivity involves not only the cultivation of professional awareness and self-awareness but also the enhancement of their practical capabilities—namely, their capacity for self-improvement and their ability to assist students in achieving growth—which profoundly reflects the core essence of the teacher's subjectivity: the dialectical unity between "self-cultivation" and "student growth" (Qu & Liu, 2023). Teaching is both a profession and a mission; teachers and students are two indispensable components of the educational reality—both are essential and mutually dependent upon one another. Only when countless teachers engage in "action" and "practice" can students be subtly influenced and comforted; when students perceive such goodwill, they will inevitably carry this kindness into their lives. Teachers also demonstrate wisdom by providing support and engaging in altruism, by coordinating the internal needs of students with diverse characteristics, thereby enriching themselves, becoming themselves, realizing their value, and perfecting themselves. As B recounted, she did not perform well on her exam, but the teacher comforted her; when she was overwhelmed with despair, the teacher's words brought her solace: "It's okay; the teacher believes you have always been excellent. A single failure does not signify much; next time, you will certainly do well. The teacher believes in you." These words conveyed genuine sincerity, alleviating the student's inner turmoil and sorrow at that moment—a force that is intangible yet powerful, capable of warming a single instant and healing a lifetime.

4.4 Nurturing the Soul and Character Education

Within the realm of basic education, if someone asks me where teachers should focus their efforts most in educating students, the answer would be extremely clear and firm: the shaping of character and the development of thinking. All contemporary educational pursuits within specific socio-cultural contexts must be grounded in these principles; otherwise, no matter how noble our visions for talent cultivation may be, we will ultimately fail to achieve them (Liu, 2024). Teachers who are beloved by their students possess qualities such as solid professional knowledge, a strong sense of responsibility, tolerance, kindness, encouragement, rigor, and respect—qualities that enable them to instinctively care for, assist, and guide their students. The simultaneous emphasis on all five aspects of education represents a form of nurturing for the student; explicit education is simultaneously imbued with rich implicit education. Through the manifestation of these personal traits and the actions of the teacher, the transmission of knowledge and the cultivation of abilities are inherent to the profession itself; yet, it is through the heart-to-heart connection between teacher and student that character education takes root in the student—a

remarkable chemical reaction of love, embodying the profound wisdom of the educator in fostering individuals: enlightening minds and nourishing hearts, tailoring instruction to individual aptitudes—thereby enabling the character of happy children to develop fully and giving rise to truly quality education. Liu Qingchang stated: "The ideal character that educators aim to shape should, at its purest foundation, at least encompass the following elements: first, serenity—far from agitation; second, clarity—far from gloom; third, harmony—far from stubbornness; and finally, initiative—far from indolence." (Liu, 2024) Among children who have been nurtured by their teachers, none can be far from meeting this standard; they lead more brilliant lives.

5. Revelations

The personal qualities that make a teacher popular among students stem from various factors such as their family background, upbringing, educational experiences, personal awareness, internal values, and moral character. These all represent unique personal traits. However, through the qualitative analysis of the original text, the experience summary and theoretical exploration behind the text are extracted, and the excellent qualities such as kindness and sincerity, dedication and dedication, and love for students are summarized, which can be used as the learning content of the majority of teachers. Consciously integrate these qualities into their own teaching practice, constantly sum up experience in educational actions, improve educational wisdom, and reflect personal value and significance on the road of educating people, contributing and leading students to become talents.

Teachers first of all, they should have a sense of personal accomplishment and professional value. The quality they embody to students is not what they intend to do, but from the implicit and silent self-action. It is the embodiment of good values, world outlook and outlook on life in the teacher's profession. It happens that these qualities are what children need, touch their small hearts, plant the seeds of kindness, and then affect students' emotions and learning behaviors, which are praised by students. This reflects a passage by Mr. Xia Mianzun, who wrote in the translator's preface to Amicis's **The Education of Love**: "It is like digging a pond: some argue that a square shape is better, others argue that a circular shape is better, constantly shifting back and forth between the two, yet no one pays attention to the essential element—the water—that defines what a pond truly is. What is this 'water' in education? It is emotion; it is love. When education lacks love, it becomes a pond devoid of water—whether it takes the form of a square or a circle, it can never escape emptiness." (Liu, 2006) Following the spirit of an educator does not necessarily require grand narratives; it simply entails taking action and treating others with goodwill. The spirit of an educator is like a beam of light that illuminates the path forward for teachers. On this illuminated path, teacher education can involve educators sharing their pedagogical experiences and absorbing effective teaching methods, witnessing the shaping and influence exerted by one soul upon another, and fostering a profound reverence for education.

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