



A Preliminary Study of the Thoughts in Sywe Ji for Teachers' Professional Development in an Undergraduate Course in Chinese Literature

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Abstract

In a culture characterized by rapid changes in technology and society, teachers' professional development is important, as they must improve their abilities continuously in order to be competent in their jobs. The researcher found a similarity between the thoughts on education in the ancient treatise, Sywe Ji, and many ideas set forth in books that discuss modern teachers' professional development that is worth further study. Sywe Ji is an ancient record of thoughts about Confucian education. It contains much discussion about issues related to education, such as the necessity for teachers to employ introspection and work towards continuous growth. The treatise is both inspiring and meaningful for the professional development of teachers of undergraduate courses in Chinese. Therefore, this study was designed to explore the relevance of the Sywe Ji to

teachers' professional development. The research method adopted was content analysis, a qualitative method. The results include the original text of the thoughts and the corresponding analyses of their meanings relative to teachers' professional development. It is hoped that this study can offer teachers some guidance in their professional development.

Key Words: *Sywe Ji; Chinese literature course; teachers' professional development*

Introduction

In this age of knowledge-based economy, knowledge is renewed constantly. Undergraduate teachers of Chinese literature are at the forefront of Chinese knowledge delivery. Ways in which teachers can remain current on their knowledge through continuous self-improvement and professional growth has become an important issue in education today. The professional development of teachers of



undergraduate Chinese literature courses can improve not only their teaching abilities, but also their ability to guide students. *Sywe Ji* contains simple, but clear and penetrating discussions of these two subjects. Therefore, this study analyzed the thoughts on education presented in *Sywe Ji* in the hope of inspiring teachers in their professional development.

Literature Review

Sywe Ji is an important classical treatise on Confucianism that contains arguments that are connected to those in many books about teachers' professional development today. In education, teachers' ability to engage in introspection is essential (Chang, 2013; Wu, 2010; Huang, 2013), and they need to realize its importance (Chang, Ting, Liu, Kao, and Kang, 2013). Only introspection can lead to continuous learning (Ou, 2003) and professional growth (Dung, 1998). Teachers' practices of professional growth lie in their teaching methods, their interactions with students, and the implementation of their teaching goals. With respect to teaching methods, teachers should present what they want to teach clearly to achieve knowledge integration (Liao, 2004; Tsai, 2004). They also should adopt diverse teaching methods to improve their students'

confidence (Wu, 2012) so that they can achieve more and cooperate with each other (Chang, 2000) to produce better learning outcomes (Yen, 2007).

Moreover, teachers should inspire their students to think through the design of their questions (Ou, 2003). For example, they can guide students to think more critically by asking open-ended questions (Chang, 2000). To inspire students, it is important to avoid causing them to repress their emotions (Wu, 2012). Further, it is essential to give them sufficient scope to think and express their ideas (Chang, 2000; Wu, 2012; Liao, 2004) in order to achieve creative and interactive dialogue (Ou & Chen, 2003) and increase their interest in learning (Huang, 2009). Teachers must listen to their students when they answer questions to learn more about their views (Chen, 1997) and learning abilities (Liao, 2004). Moreover, by observing students' performance (Yen, 2007) and guiding them to comprehend by analogy (Chang, 2000), teachers can help them clarify their thoughts through an investigation of problems (Ou & Chen, 2003). These arguments above are not only the essentials in *Sywe Ji*, but also the opinions of modern scholars. Therefore, it is



worthwhile to consider these issues further for the professional development of teachers of undergraduate courses in Chinese literature.

This study adopted a content analysis method, a form of qualitative research (Wang, 2001) to analyze the issues related to teachers' professional development in the original text of Sywe Ji, using the version entitled, "Chinese Article Compilation: Sywe Ji (Chang Jung Christian University, 2001). To avoid the drawbacks of focusing on characters (Hsu, handout, Sep., 2015), this study did not interpret any character or word from the text, but rather analyzed the concepts overall. The following method and steps were used: (1) reading the content; (2) identifying the meanings of the characters; (3) identifying the concepts related to teachers' professional development in teaching undergraduate courses in Chinese literature, and recording the corresponding sentences; (4) checking whether any of the unrecorded sentences are related to teachers' professional development from various perspectives in the second round, and recoding those found to be related; (5) using the original text of the recorded sentences as the basis for the thoughts to be analyzed, and (6) extending the thoughts to a discussion regarding the professional

development of teachers of undergraduate courses in Chinese literature.

Results and Discussion

Teaching an undergraduate course in Chinese literature is an essential profession

Thoughts from the original text

In the original text, "jade must be cut and chiseled to make it a useful vessel," and, "you don't know how delicious a dish is if you don't eat it," are used as figures of speech to explain that learning leads to positive outcomes. Confucius proposed that the foundation of politics should be creating positive influences on culture and society to produce good people and achieve the purpose of improving their customs and well being. Confucius indicated that there are people who are not good, and who cause societal chaos. Thus, this study stresses that teaching an undergraduate course in Chinese literature literature is a way to help people learn and improve their social and cultural values.

Analysis and discussion

Education begins with individuals. When the power of education expands, good values form naturally. Thus, the inherent foundation of education is humanity. In



ancient times, a primary goal of education was to inspire people's good nature. As a result, the educational philosophy of Confucius' school focused on instilling personality and moral character. This is also a goal of an undergraduate course in Chinese literature.

Becoming part of a learning group

Thoughts from the original text

The Sywe Ji suggests that learning activities are performed through group systems. Thus, a student must be interested in becoming part of a learning group. This ability is one of the indices that teachers use to assess their students. The literature also indicates that learning by oneself may lead to loneliness and the acquisition of limited information.

Analysis and discussion

Educational activities are performed through group processes. Thus, how to get along well with peers in a learning group to create an atmosphere of mutual encouragement is very important, not only in education in ancient China, but also in modern education.

A teacher must be able to manage a class so that it becomes a support system in which peers complement each other. In addition to

imparting knowledge, a teacher must help the students become part of the social system of the class. He must build a learning environment which is good in every aspect. Thus, a teacher of undergraduate Chinese literature must guide his students in moral behavior, so that the atmosphere in the class and on the campus is friendly and cooperative.

Learning must be applied in daily life

Thoughts from the original text

The treatise indicates that learning covers everything in life. The only way to learn and achieve is to remember the spirit and goals of learning in classes, at home, on and off-campus, and in society.

Analysis and discussion

In ancient China, the focus of education was on field practices, the fact that education and learning are integral aspects of daily life. Thus, daily life is a reflection of the practical application of one's educational achievements. Thus, teachers must care about their students' lives outside the campus, and encourage and guide them in concepts and behaviors of daily life through their teaching, so that they do not engage in



anything illegal under the influence of others in society.

Teachers must observe their students all the time

Thoughts from the original text

A teacher's responsibility is to care about and observe his/her students all the time in order to determine their true opinions and thoughts.

Analysis and discussion

Regarding a teacher's responsibility, in ancient China, the focus was on paying full attention. At all times, a teacher must observe his/her students' words, deeds, and psychology. When teachers observe their students' behavioral performance, their assessments should not be limited to their performance in school. They should observe their students' words and deeds often to identify any unusual conditions that may influence them. This is the only way to identify problems early and offer appropriate and timely assistance or report the problems to related authorities so they may be resolved promptly rather than becoming worse. Further, teachers of undergraduate Chinese literature can teach

their students about Chinese fables to help them gain a better understanding of life.

In education, knowledge must be used flexibly

Thoughts from the original text

For education to be successful, teachers must ensure that their students comprehend and apply what they have learned.

Analysis and discussion

One purpose of education is to help students grow and mature. Thus, if students cannot set a goal to apply their knowledge, affection, and skills flexibly, it will not be beneficial to their learning. Thus, teachers of undergraduate Chinese courses should require their students to read Chinese classic literature about historical sage biography to enrich their vision of life.

Teachers must pay attention to individualized education

Thoughts from the original text

In teaching, teachers must make arrangements based on students' levels, aptitudes, and learning progress. Otherwise, students will not learn happily, may hate their teachers when they feel frustrated, and fail to learn as a result.



Analysis and discussion

In education, teachers must know their students' backgrounds and abilities in order to choose the most effective teaching methods for individual students and instruct them according to their Chinese reading and writing talent, abilities, gifts, and interests.

In education, it is important to help students understand the benefits of learning

Thoughts from the original text

Teaching students to identify the benefits of learning by themselves is the only way to make sure that they do not forget what they have learned immediately after they learn it.

Analysis and discussion

In general, Chinese courses, especially those on classical literature, are boring for undergraduate students. Thus, teachers must be able to create a teaching plan with a clear statement of the course goals and expected effects on their future careers, so that students will be eager to learn and will actually benefit from learning.

Teachers must seize every opportunity for education

Thoughts from the original text

When a teacher teaches a student at the moment most likely to produce good educational effects, this is called the "real-time method."

Analysis and discussion

In education, teachers must be wise enough to seize the best opportunity to teach their students using actual events that are taking place in the society. This is the best way to connect Chinese classical literature to life issues to enhance their thinking and value judgments, and improve their learning outcomes.

Using the method of learning from each other

Thoughts from the original text

Teachers should foster the method of learning from peers to maximize the positive influences of peers' advantages, strong points, and morals.

Analysis and discussion

Teachers can apply the learning method of interactions among peers, such as group discussions and group assignments in writing fiction, and poetry, or appoint students with outstanding performance as assistant teachers to help their classmates in



writing. It is also important to share their work with each other.

Effective attitudes and methods, and their effects on education

Thoughts from the original text

Teachers should lead and guide their students, and the method they use should serve to offer hints to the students that facilitate their thinking without putting pressure on them. This way, students will perceive their teachers' gentle attitude, accept the soft method, and grasp the opportunity for deeper thought. This is the effect of good education.

Analysis and discussion

When teaching, if teachers use inspiration to guide students, step-by-step, to learn how to take the initiative, without forcing them by constraint, a harmonious relationship can be achieved between teachers and students, and students can accept the teacher's guidance, further achieving the purpose of education efficiently. This is an important way for teachers of Chinese courses to train students to become, for example, future freelance writers.

Identifying and remedying students' defects in temperament

Thoughts from the original text

Teachers must identify their students' defects in temperament, such as lack of knowledge, emotional instability, resistance to novelty, and leaving work unfinished. After identifying their psychological defects, teachers can then implement corresponding remedies. Thus, education is not only an effort to enhance students' strong points, but also to correct their psychological defects and problems.

Analysis and discussion

Teachers' understanding of their students is not based merely on observations of their strengths, but also of their psychological weaknesses, which must be examined in detail. Behavioral performance is often related to psychological factors. In understanding these factors, teachers can then help their students cope with their weaknesses. In this way, learning and psychological growth can be encouraged.

According to traditional Chinese thought, a key factor that can influence a person's future development is not his/her exam grades, but moral character. When people



have a psychological issue, if their teachers cannot offer proper guidance or refer them to a professional for assistance, the result may be some deviant behavior that can ruin their lives. For example, if a student believes that doing something illegal is not a major issue, when his/her teacher finds out, the teacher should offer guidance immediately to prevent adverse future outcomes. It is the responsibility of a Chinese teacher to select positive psychological literature to teach material, because there is much classical Chinese literature related to life, moral, and behavioral wisdom, as well as courage that will inspire students to improve their psychological weaknesses.

The principles of language and manner of speaking when teaching students

Thoughts from the original text

The treatise indicates that there are three principles of teachers' language use: (1) keeping it simple and to the point without nagging; (2) making it clever and pleasant, and (3) making sure the meanings behind words are clear and easy to understand.

Analysis and discussion

The main goal of teaching students is to make sure they can receive and follow

instructions. In communicating with students, the primary medium is language. Thus, teachers should use good communication skills to build a friendly relationship with their students and ease any tension or hostility. Teachers also should avoid provoking students emotionally. They should influence their students by using language close to students hearts in order to arouse their potential creative writing abilities.

Teaching students with diverse methods of explanation

Thoughts from the original text

To teach students, it is important to help them understand completely. To achieve this, teachers must first learn more about their students' backgrounds and the degree of difficulty of the content to be taught. After clarifying these carefully, teachers can adopt diverse methods of explanation and use any metaphors necessary. This is what makes a good teacher.

Analysis and discussion

It is rather difficult to help students understand the meaning of learning if a teacher has only a smattering of knowledge. Thus, when explaining a concept, teachers



should adopt varied methods to meet the different needs of individual students. They also can try to improve students' comprehension with examples that use lively language. There are many ancient words in Chinese, and to avoid confusing the students, teachers should use pluralistic perspectives of interpretation for easy understanding.

Listening to students to understand their opinions and questions

Thoughts from the original text

Simply teaching students to memorize facts does not make a person a teacher. A teacher must be able to listen to his/her students first to understand their thoughts and questions. Then s/he can answer them after they have finished making statements and asking questions. If his/her answers are not sufficient to help resolve students' questions, these questions can be put aside and addressed at a later time.

Analysis and discussion

A teacher must be patient enough to listen to his/her students and learn about their thoughts, questions, and opinions. S/he can then identify the students' abilities through their expressions. Thus, a teacher must give

his/her students sufficient opportunity to voice their opinions, so that the teacher can decide which teaching method to adopt to achieve the best effects, as delivering knowledge blindly is unlikely to lead to efficient learning. In ancient Chinese literature, there are numerous philosophical topics that require a process of continuous thinking and amendments of expression. These are important goals of an undergraduate Chinese course that is designed to enrich the students' philosophy of life. Thus, undergraduate Chinese course teachers need to train themselves so they have the ability and patience to engage in dialogue with students on the philosophical issues of life.

Conclusions

Although Sywe Ji is an ancient text, the findings from this preliminary study showed its active meaning in terms of inspiration that are relevant to the professional development of modern teachers of undergraduate Chinese courses. Further, the thoughts in Sywe Ji are consistent with the concepts in many books about teachers' professional development today, including the necessity for teachers to improve their knowledge and teaching abilities constantly,



the fact that their interactions with students must be based on the students' characteristics and talents, that students' learning attitudes are important, and that harmonious teacher-student relationships should be developed. Thus, Sywe Ji is worthy of further research related to the issue of teachers' professional development.



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