

The Research on Teacher-Student Relationship from the Perspective of Educational Philosophy

Yujie Yan

School of Foreign Languages, Shanxi University, Taiyuan, China

Email: yanyujie@sxu.edu.cn

How to cite this paper: Yan, Y.J. (2019) The Research on Teacher-Student Relationship from the Perspective of Educational Philosophy. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 7, 448-459.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2019.712034>

Received: November 29, 2019

Accepted: December 28, 2019

Published: December 31, 2019

Copyright © 2019 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Teacher-student relationship is the most basic interpersonal relationship in colleges. In the teaching process, creating a relaxed and enjoyable learning climate and cultivating harmonious teacher-student relationship can not only ease students' emotional obstacles and learning anxiety, but also can promote students' learning motivation and autonomous learning consciousness. In recent years, with the development of Pedagogy and Educational Psychology, the research on teacher-student relationship has greatly increased at home and abroad. Nevertheless, the research on how to establish, facilitate, and develop teacher-student relationship from the perspective of educational philosophy is little and not in-depth. The thesis adopted the qualitative research methods. The research samples are 86 non-English major sophomores from Taiyuan College of Modern Science and Technology. Qualitative analysis is mainly based on open questionnaires, diary, interview, and observation. The thesis is divided into five parts. The main frame is as follows: 1) The first part is literature review that stated the main theories on teacher-student relationship from different educational philosophers. 2) The second part is the methodology of this research which introduces the procedures of this study, including participants, procedures of data collection. 3) The third part is mainly about the process of establishing harmonious teacher-student relationship in and after class. 4) The fourth part is the findings from the research. 5) The last part is some implications for teachers from the view of point of educational philosophy.

Keywords

Teacher-Student Relationship, Harmonious, Educational Philosophy

1. Introduction

During the last 20 years, with affective factors being paid more and more atten-

tion in foreign language teaching, there has been a growing interest in examining the teacher-student relationship in the fields of developmental and educational psychology. A large body of relevant research has examined the relationship between teachers and students during the preschool and early childhood years. These studies mainly concern the impact of teacher-student relationship on children or middle school students' achievements and motivation, however, little research on how to build the harmonious teacher-student relationship.

In colleges, teacher-student relationship plays an increasingly important role in learning especially in autonomous learning. For a long time, in China, teaching is based on the teacher-centered model and students are familiar and tied to the traditional teacher-student relationship which is an unequal relationship of superior and subordinate. Chinese students emphasized the core role of teachers in college settings and tended to regard teachers as authorities who impart and embody knowledge. However, the role of teachers should facilitate students' effective learning and create supportive, relaxed, equal and understanding learning environment to stimulate and inspire their self-directed learning, because the essence of education lies in sparking students to motivate themselves and teachers should endeavor to build lively interaction with students. Besides the responsibility of teachers to provide supportive learning climate for students, teachers should "exert a great deal of influence on establishing a good quality of teacher-student relationship" outside the classroom (Barry, 1999) [1]. Therefore, teachers should be the facilitator and counsellor rather than leader and controller in the process of college students' learning and building harmonious, caring and emotional teacher-student relationship is effective and necessary for students' autonomous learning at colleges.

2. Main Theories and Previous Studies on Teacher-Student Relationship from Different Educational Philosophers

The theoretical frameworks for teacher-student relationship analyses are most based on psychology and pedagogy theory, and using these theories to improve students' learning has been recommended and applied for many years. So far, there have been many outstanding teachers and educators who strive to validate and practice the relation between the theory and learners outcome.

2.1. Perspective of Paulo Freire on Teacher-Student Relationship

Paulo Freire, the most influential Brazilian educationalist in the late twentieth century, proposed and promoted problem-posing education which depends on dialogue and democratic teacher-student relationship and so on. For democratic teacher-student relationship, he believed that teachers should respect students and remain humble and modest about the limitations of their own knowledge.

According to Freire, problem-posing education can be achieved only within egalitarian and respectful relations. He believed that dialogue can't proceed between those who have unequal rights and views. "Those who have been denied

their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression” (Freire, 1970: 76-77) [2].

So he further stated a respectful and revolutionary relationship between teachers and students. This kind of democratic teacher-student relationship seeks to replace and shift the traditional teacher-student hierarchy with egalitarian interactions. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970: 67) [2] claimed that through the dialogue between teacher and students, the teacher of the students and the students of the teacher do not exist and a new term “teacher-student with students-teachers” emerges. The teacher is no longer the one who teaches, but the one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students and who in their turn while being taught also teaches. (Freire, 1970: 67) [2]

Freire’s “horizontal” relationship generated an amount of debate over teachers’ role in a democratic relationship. In Freire’s later writings, he refined the notion of the teacher-student relationship. In *Pedagogy of Hope*, he explained: “Dialogue between teachers and students does not place them on the same footing professionally; but it does mark the democratic position between them” (Freire, 1994: 16-117) [3].

Freire emphasized that although teacher and student share democratic social relations in education, they are not in an equal social status and footing. Teachers must be humble enough to be intended to relearn the knowledge they have already known through interacting with students. They must realize that their authority must not be allowed to degenerate into authoritarianism. He went so far as to say that “Education must start with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both of them are simultaneously students and teachers” (Freire, 1970: 72) [2].

2.2. Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Abraham Maslow’s (1970) [4] Hierarchy of Needs Theory which describes a system of needs within each person, which states that we are propelled upward and onward to attain higher and higher needs. It is regarded as a pyramid of needs as **Figure 1**.

Maslow presented the “Hierarchy of human needs” which showed that the spirit of the level of demand in the top of the pyramid of human needs. A person is not energized and stimulated to pursue the higher needs until the lower needs in the pyramid have been achieved. Therefore, if a person fails to gratify his or her fundamental needs--security, safety, love, freedom from fear, love and so on, self-actualization will not be reached. Educators should mobilize and energize learners’ motivation and enthusiasm for learning through meeting their basic needs. It is teachers’ responsibility to meet students’ needs for safety, security and love by creating comfortable and safe learning environment and displaying a supportive attitude to students.

2.3. Care Theory

Much of the recent literature and research on teacher-student relationships has



Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1970) [4].

focused on the role of caring. Care theory privileges the emotional connections between teachers and students and emphasizes the importance of the reciprocal nature and “synergistic power” of the relationships between teachers and students (Marlowe, 2006: 94) [5].

Nel Noddings, one of the leading figures in the field of Educational Philosophy, is renowned in both education and philosophy for her promotion of the “care theory”. She has written widely about caring schools, caring classrooms and teacher care, and her care theory and works were often applied in education.

According to some research findings, students who feel their teachers are caring and fair are more likely to have positive attitudes towards learning, greater motivation to success, and increased engagement and involvement in learning tasks (Babad, 1996; Hudley & Daoud, 2007; *et al.*) [6]. In a caring relationship with teachers, students can feel the caring and responds the teacher in some detectable manner. A student may realize and acknowledge her teacher's caring directly, with verbal gratitude or non-verbal action, such as active self-directed learning or active classroom interaction with teachers, or simply pursuing and achieving their learning goals more confidently.

Therefore, teacher care is regarded as the foundation for effective teacher-student relationships by many researchers. Teacher care enables learners to feel accepted, important, respected, and never ignored, and thus they are more likely to express their thoughts actively and seek improvement in their learning.

Gay, G (2000) [7] strongly advocated caring teacher-student relationships for

autonomous learning. Other researchers and scholars all hold a common view that the emotional connection between teachers and students is crucial for academic success (Elias, 1997: 45) [8]. Noddings (2005) [9] argued “schools cannot accomplish their academic goals without attending to the fundamental needs of students for continuity and care”. So it is the responsibility for educator or teachers to establish a caring, supportive and harmonious community within the wider school setting. The caring teacher should strive first to establish and maintain caring relationships with students, and these relationships will provide a foundation for education. Besides, like Nodding’s words, caring teacher-student relationship as the foundation for pedagogical activity brings win-win effect for students and teachers.

Therefore, the importance for students to feel them in a caring and safe community is emphasized. Elias *et al.* (1997) [8], McCombs and Whisler (1997) [10] claimed that people will work better when they are in a caring community. Peterson (1992) [11] claimed: “community in itself is more important to learning than any method or technique. When community exists, learning is strengthened.” He went on to express his belief that the care of teachers “breathes purpose and life into learning. Learning is social”. The students who are genuinely accepted and cared about by teachers can generate higher levels of success than those who are not. So learners will feel safe and be affirmed when they are linked with a caring teacher-student relationship.

2.4. The Impact of Previous Teacher-Student Relationship Experiences on Later Learning Process and School Adjustment

A large body of research suggested that there is consistency in the quality of the student-teacher relationship from preschool (Birch & Ladd, 1997, *et al.*) [12]. In the investigation of early student-teacher relationship, it was found that early student-teacher relationship may be particularly obvious and prominent in students’ later learning performance.

Pianta (1999) [13] pointed that the trajectories of children’s later learning process, school adjustment and the relationships with adults and peers are strongly influenced by the previous experiences of school years. He considered the early years as a “sensitive period” that has great impact on the children’s later development. Students who have behavioral problems often experienced a history of conflict in the relationships with teachers and peers. Student relationship with teachers in early school years can change or even reframe their developmental routes. What’s more, teachers can remodel the relationship with students through better nurturing and supporting the child to affect the quality of future teacher-student relationship.

When teachers meet young students’ needs, by developing positive teacher-student interactions and applying effective teaching techniques and not emphasizing competition, students report emotional well-being and higher motivation in learning (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998) [14]. As to the students who have aggressive behaviors, teachers can foster positive and supportive school

adjustment for them. Positive student-teacher relationship is associated with motivation, achievement, and social and learning competence in school.

From many research surveys, we can know that few students describe their teachers as friends or as the source of a close personal relationship during middle school period (Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992) [15]. The children who have poor relationship with teachers and poor school adjustment are more likely to fail course work, to have higher absenteeism, and to fail to complete future study. Some researchers have validated that students who have a secure relationship with previous caregiver can experience more positive school adjustment and this relation can further affect later learning and school adjustment.

Therefore, former teachers play key roles in the process of students' learning and school adjustment. Yoshiyuki Nakata (2006: 17-18) [16] claims that: "The teacher is the one who is responsible for creating the appropriate learning environment and for continuously making efforts to create better environment. Under such environment, learners may have meaningful experience, become intrinsically motivated, and as a result find a meaningful 'self'". Therefore, it is teachers' responsibility to nurture appropriate learning environment for students.

3. Methodology

3.1. Purpose

The purpose of qualitative research implemented by the author is to probe into the teacher-student relationship between teacher and students in detail and comprehensively. Through qualitative research, the author aims to explore: 1) what kind of teacher-student relationship is student desire? 2) What are the good teacher standards students think of?

3.2. Participants

Open questionnaires which are attached to the main questionnaire of quantitative research were delivered to all students from Taiyuan College of Modern Science and Technology. All the students (86 subjects) are required to keep a diary in a week. The case study is directed to 4 subjects the College.

3.3. Data Collection

The research data are collected through administration of open questionnaire, interview, diary and observation.

3.3.1. Administration of Open Questionnaire

In the end of the first semester, all students participated in the open questionnaire survey. The following are the questions from open questionnaire:

- 1) How do you think of the relationship between you and the author?
- 2) Are you satisfied with the current teacher-student relationship?
- 3) What kind of teacher-student relationship do you desire most?
- 4) Do you believe that good teacher-student relationship can promote your

learning?

3.3.2. Procedures of Interview

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with a fairly open framework which starts with more general questions and allows both interviewer and the person being interviewed the flexibility to probe for detail or discuss issues. So in order to deepen the research and find out some insights, detailed information and general thoughts of subjects, the author conducted semi-structured interview to them. For the sake of research, the author made two hypotheses in mind and aimed to testify them. The first one is that previous teacher-student relationship experiences play a very important role in students' later learning. The second one is high-quality teacher-student relationship can nurture students' interest, change learning attitude and made students be more diligent, active and creative. In semi-interview, interviewer has the freedom to tailor their questions for the specific condition of every subject. The author mainly adopted face-to-face interview which is very directive, online conversation through which the author found the subjects are more likely to talk their inner thoughts and telephone conversation, then record and segment the content in detail.

3.3.3. Procedures of Diary and Observation

The subjects are all the author's students, so during the interval of the class, the author always chats with them in a casual way and observes their performance and reaction in class. During the first semester, the author required the subjects to keep a Chinese diary in one week.

Because the specific topic that the author wants to explore in the research should usually be thought about well in advance, the author listed some questions or wrote down a topic on the blackboard for students' reference to write the dairies. Of course, they are permitted to talk about their own thoughts freely.

4. How to Establish Harmonious Teacher-Student Relationship in and after Class

This chapter mainly introduces the process of establishing harmonious teacher-student relationship in and after class. In class, the author adopted student-centered learning through organizing appropriate classroom activities and interacting with students to create an emotionally supportive learning environment. After class, the author also devoted much time to developing emotional and positive relationships with students.

As we know, teachers have the responsibility to create an emotionally supportive learning environment by providing and organizing meaningful, achievable, interesting learning tasks and activities. As we mentioned before, teacher-student relationship is a product of dynamic and reciprocal interactions. Benson (2000) [17] claimed some conceptions about how to foster autonomy, one of them is classroom-based approaches which emphasize role changes in the relationship between teachers and students in the classroom to facilitate stu-

dents' autonomy through classroom interaction, because this kind of language classroom involves more intensive interaction compared to the lectured-delivered lessons. Yoshiyuki (2006) also claimed that the teacher has the duty to provide appropriate learning environment and continuously making efforts to create better environment. Under such environment, students can get meaningful learning experience and become intrinsically motivated. The following are some activities for facilitating student-centered learning.

4.1. Facilitating Student-Centered Learning in Class

To Rogers, creating successful interpersonal relationships with students was fundamental. He believed in creating a classroom environment where all participants (ie. teachers as well as pupils) were co-learners in the educational journey which can develop a high-quality teacher-student relationship.

The concept of student-centered learning has been advocated as early as 1905 to Hayward and in 1956 to Dewey's work. As we have reviewed in chapter two, Carl Rogers (1994) [18] is associated with expanding this approach into a general theory of education. In his book "*Freedom to Learn*", he presented the power shift from the expert teacher to the learners, driven by a need for a change in the traditional environment, in "so-called traditional educational atmosphere, students become passive, apathetic and bored". In the framework of student-centered learning, many researchers particularly elaborated the student-teacher relationship and presented the main principles of student-centered learning, such as high-quality teacher-student relationship should be equal to promote students' growth and development. In such relation, the teacher becomes a facilitator and resource person.

Facilitating Student-Centered Learning can be conducted by literature circles discussion, role play, and being impartial, genuine and caring towards students in class. Student-centered learning emphasizes students' participating in the learning activity and process. So for the sake of creating a supportive environment for learning, the author endeavored to explore the teaching materials which are based on textbooks and to the greatest extent, give students more opportunities to involve in some meaningful activities in classroom learning. These activities were all negotiated with students and got satisfactory effect in classroom. Apart from organizing classroom activities, the author also showed her impartial, genuine, and caring attitudes towards students to shorten the distance.

4.2. Developing Teacher-Student Relationship after Class

Teacher and students should be in an equal environment, and then they can be friends and communicate freely. After class, as long as the author has spare time, she would often visit students in their dormitories and chat with them to know their thoughts, psychological state, needs in study and life. During the process of communicating with students, the author noticed that many students like telling

their inner thoughts: happiness, sadness, difficulties in life and study.

Besides, the teacher should often talk about his/her own methods in learning and encourage and exhort them to be diligent, active and creative. Establishing the supportive, caring and harmonious relationship with students can promote students' autonomous learning by the teacher in and after class.

5. Findings from the Research

The author conducted the research by open questionnaires and diaries that are delivered to all the subjects and case study through interview and observation. So the findings focus on the type of teacher-student relationship that students' desire good teacher standards.

5.1. The Kinds of TSR Students Desire

Most of the students expressed that good teachers should be good at creating high-quality teacher-student relationship, communicating with students actively and understanding students' situation of study and so on. The following are the type of teacher-student relationship they desire most:

- 1) The teacher should be a mentor. Most of the students hope that the teacher can not only be their scholarly mentor but also their beneficial friend.
- 2) Students can communicate with teachers like peers and have no feeling of distance.
- 3) Students can give timely feedback to the teacher.
- 4) The relationship should not be an unequal interpersonal relationship between superior and subordinate.
- 5) Mutual trust and mutual understandings should be advocated.

5.2. Good Teacher Standards from Students' Perspectives

Through analysis of open questionnaires and dairies collected by the author, there are some standards for good English teachers put forward by students from four aspects: teaching behavior, communication style, personality and morality, and individual care.

5.2.1. Teaching Behavior

- 1) A good teacher should be witty and humorous and the class should be lively and interesting to attract students.
- 2) A good teacher can mobilize the initiative of students who are not interested in learning and communicate with them at any time.
- 3) A good teacher can eliminate some students' fear and anxiety in learning by encouragement and inspiration.
- 4) Teaching content should be detailed, efficient and systematic, not just be limited to the textbook, and also can stimulate students' enthusiasm.
- 5) Teaching style should be diverse, and can cultivate students' interest by organizing classroom activities such as debate, drama performance and so forth.
- 6) A good teacher can impart some learning strategies and methods.

7) A good teacher should teach with the elicitation method and can inspire students to discuss, think and dispute.

8) The class should be very relaxing, flexible and full of interactions to improve students' learning level in free and supportive atmosphere.

9) A good teacher should be knowledgeable.

5.2.2. Communication Style

1) Students can always talk and feel easy with the teacher, not in the least constrained.

2) The teacher should have affinity, and can be contacted anytime, anywhere.

3) The teacher can regularly participate in students' activities such as picnic and spring outing, and play well with them without condescending attitude.

4) Teachers can often talk about her learning experience and learning skills.

5.2.3. Personality and Morality

1) The teacher should have a cheerful personality and a good temper, smile more and be easygoing.

2) Students can get understanding and respect from the teacher.

3) The teacher should be earnest, responsible and inoffensive.

4) The teacher should have great personal charm.

5) The teacher should be honest, sincere and reliable.

5.2.4. Individual Care

1) The teacher takes the initiative to communicate with me and notice me.

2) When I need help, the teacher is willing to help me.

3) If I have something troublesome in my mind, I can tell her to get some comfort and ask for her advice.

4) The teacher should try to understand everyone's mental state and personality.

5) The teacher should be impartial and treat all students equally.

6) For laggards and some students who lack confidence, the teacher can encourage and motivate them.

7) The teacher should understand the strengths and weaknesses of each student.

8) More encouragement and recognition from teacher can increase students' motivation and sense of accomplishment.

9) The teacher should remember each student's name.

6. Implications of Educational Philosophy

Effective teacher-student relationship can promote students' learning, which requires teachers to have the ability to bridge the emotional connectedness with students, and then the meaningful learning can be achieved in a supportive setting. The following are some implications for teachers to boost students' autonomous learning:

First, teachers should provide a helpful, incentive, caring and supportive

learning environment for learners. As a facilitator, he or she also should show enthusiasm, emphatic understanding and genuine caring. In class, the teacher should endeavor to stimulate students' interest and carry on teaching effectively by the student-centered learning. Through allowing students freedom to learn and involving students in collaborative work and discussion, students' problem-solving ability can be improved. Teachers also should permit students to make mistakes and often reward students' excellent performance. A positive teacher-student relationship can make students feel relaxed, confident and happy, thus resulting in effective learning outcomes.

Second, teachers should often communicate and chat with students after class to know their mental states. For establishing high-quality teacher-student relationship, it is vitally important to understand each student, cater for their needs and minimize their negative attitudes towards learning. So it is helpful for learning by bridging the emotional and friendly connection with students through "horizontal" dialogues.

Third, teacher-student relationship, a pivotal role in students' learning, has a great impact on students' motivation, self-efficacy and learning attitude, so teachers should be good at stimulating and enhancing students' motivation, correcting their learning attitude and building their confidence to facilitate their self-directed learning. Effective teachers can build up a warm rapport with students in and after class.

Fourth, as to the students who have low academic achievements, teachers should respect, accept and reward them, contribute to their emotional well-being, encourage them to take risks in learning and challenge themselves. Because students can realize the encouragement and care from teachers in some detectable manner, some verbal or nonverbal gratitude or behavior of teachers can lead them to be more confident in learning.

Nowadays, in China, it has little research on teacher-student relationship from the perspectives of Educational Philosophy and most of research is in the domain of Pedagogy and Educational Psychology. Teacher-student relationship is very important in students' learning, so further investigation in this area should be conducted by more researchers of Educational Philosophy, which can provide more practical suggestions and methods for teachers.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- [1] Barry, K. and King, L. (1999) *Beginning Teaching and Beyond*. Social Science Press, New South Wales.
- [2] Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Herder and Herder, New York, 67-78.
- [3] Freire, P. and Araújo Freire, A.M. (1994) *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of*

the Oppressed. Continuum, New York, 116-117.

- [4] Maslow, A.H. (1970) *Motivation and Personality*. Harper and Row, New York.
- [5] Marlowe, M. (2006) Theory Hayden's Teacher Lore: A Pedagogy of Caring. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, **32**, 94-103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607470500511074>
- [6] Babad, E. (1996) How High Is "High Inference"? Within Classroom Differences in Students' Perceptions of Classroom Interaction. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, **31**, 1-9.
- [7] Gay, G. (2000) *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, & Practice*. Teachers College Press, New York.
- [8] Elias, M.J., Greenberg, M.T., Haynes, N.M., *et al.* (1997) *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*. Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.
- [9] Noddings, N. (2005) *The Challenge to Care in Schools*. Teachers College Press, New York.
- [10] McCombs, B.L. and Whisler, J.S. (1997) *The Learner-Centered Classroom and School: Strategies for Increasing Student Motivation and Achievement*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- [11] Peterson, R. (1992) *Life in a Crowded Place: Making a Learning Community*. Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.
- [12] Birch, S.H. and Ladd, G.W. (1997) The Teacher-Child Relationship and Children's Early School Adjustment. *Journal of School Psychology*, **35**, 61-79. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4405\(96\)00029-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4405(96)00029-5)
- [13] Pianta, R.C. (1999) *Enhancing Relationships between Children and Teachers*. American Psychological Association, Washington DC. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10314-000>
- [14] Eccles, J.S. and Roeser, R.W. (1998) Adolescents' Perceptions of Middle School: Relation to Longitudinal Changes in Academic and Psychological Adjustment. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, **88**, 123-158. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327795jra0801_6
- [15] Lempers, J.D. and Clarke-Lempers, D.S. (1992) Young, Middle, and Late Adolescents Comparison of the Functional Importance of Five Significant Relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, **21**, 54-96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01536983>
- [16] Nakata, Y. (2006) *Motivation and Experience in Foreign Language Learning*. International Academic Publishers, Bern, 77.
- [17] Benson, P. and Voller, P. (1997) *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. Longman, London, 2.
- [18] Rogers, C.R. (1994) *Freedom to Learn*. Prentice Hall Press, Upper Saddle River, NJ.