

# Philosophical Reflection on the Construction of New Teacher-Student Relationship

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**Abstract:** “Teacher” and “student” are the two most crucial subjects in the process of education, and the relationship between them can directly reflect the changes of the main contradictions in the process of education and teaching. The relationship between teachers and students not only affects the physical and mental health of students, but also determines the final quality and level of teaching. Due to the long-term influence of the concept of exam-oriented education, the traditional value of “teacher’s dignity” and the low level of professional ethics of some teachers, the current teacher-student relationship still has problems including “teacher-centeredness”, the lack of emotional communication between teachers and students, and the interest-oriented relationship between teachers and students. Therefore, it is urgent to build a new type of teacher-student relationship. This paper proposes a specific path to build a new type of teacher-student relationship from a philosophical perspective, taking the theory of intersubjectivity, materialistic dialectics and materialistic historical view as the theoretical support to address the problems in the current teacher-student relationship.

**Keywords:** Teacher-student relationship; Philosophical perspective; Materialistic dialectic; Intersubjectivity

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## 1. Teacher-student relationship and its philosophical essence

### 1.1 Concept of teacher-student relationship

The relationship between teachers and students is the foundation of the whole education and teaching process, which not only affects students' trust in teachers, but also has a great impact on the quality and effectiveness of teaching. The general literature on teacher-student relationship often tends to be formulaic and ordinary, that is, it directly regards teacher-student relationship with special characteristics as general social relationship and simplifies the special teacher-student relationship, so that it cannot show the special connotation of teacher-student relationship. For a long time, scholars in China thought that the study of teacher-student relationship was studying the relationship between subject and object. Until around the 21st century, scholars began to focus on the study of new democratic teacher-student relationship, and the meaning of teacher-student relationship began to diversify.

In the author's view, teacher-student relationship is a series of relationships such as ethical, pedagogical, and interpersonal relationships between teachers and students in the process of teaching and learning in order to achieve common goals, but the main relationship between teachers and students is the relationship between teaching and learning. It should be clearly emphasized that the teacher-student relationship is not a simple addition or enumeration of all social relationships, but a dynamic interaction between two subjects: teachers and students. The essence of teacher-student relationship is the communication and intercommunication between teachers and students in the spirit and mind, and there is no distinction between who is the subject and who is the object.

### 1.2 The philosophical essence of the teacher-student relationship

#### 1.2.1 Inter-subjectivity theory of teacher-student relationship

Different scholars in China and abroad have given different explanations and analyses to the concept of subjectivity. Descartes, a famous French philosopher, put forward the important assertion of "I think, therefore I am", and believed that all the objective objects known by the subject are objects, except for himself, the subject of knowledge. Feuerbach pointed out that

subjectivity is the subjective initiative of people with abstract thinking ability who live in the real society and try to transform the whole nature and human society. However, there is a big difference between intersubjectivity and subjectivity. Habermas' theory of interaction behavior, "intersubjectivity", reflects the activity construction model of "subject-object-subject", which is different from the traditional "subject-object" model. This mode of construction is different from the traditional "subject-object" mode, in which the two subjects of interaction activities interact on an equal basis, instead of one possessing and suppressing the other, which is conducive to stimulating the subject's autonomy, dynamism and creativity. <sup>[1]</sup>Inter-subjectivity is the cross-interaction between multiple subjects, which by implication means that it gets rid of the previous simple dualistic state of subject and object, and focuses on the interaction between multiple subjects with each other. This means a certain negation of Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" subjectivity thinking, and that the relationship between two subjects is no longer simply subordinate and primary, but a harmonious and symbiotic one.

Then the crisis of teacher-student relationship today is mainly the lack of inter-subjectivity between teachers and students, which is manifested by the unilateral role of the subject to the object in the interaction between teachers and students. The reason for this phenomenon is that on the one hand, the teacher is the dominant person in the whole teaching process, and it is obvious that there is a state of inequality between teachers and students; on the other hand, some teachers rely on their "teaching" status to strengthen their own authority. The use of coercive and oppressive relationships to maintain the teacher's authority can lead to the loss of students' subjectivity and eventually lead to tension in the teacher-student relationship. However, a truly harmonious teacher-student relationship should advocate that teachers and students maintain equal dialogue in the process of interaction, and teachers should take the initiative to understand the inner state of students, and students should understand the teacher in real time, in order to realize the transition from subjectivity to intersubjectivity in the teacher-student relationship.

### **1.2.2 The philosophical theory of "I-Thou" dialogue embodied in the teacher-student relationship**

Martin Buber attaches great importance to the dialogue between human beings and divides human relations into "I-it" and "I-Thou" relations in the philosophy of dialogue. In his philosophy of dialogue, he divides human relationships into "I-it" and "I-Thou" relationships. He strongly discourages the "I-it" relationship, considering it as an unequal relationship, a relationship in which the subject exerts influence on the object by using his own experience. The "I-Thou" relationship is a true reciprocal relationship, in which the "I" sees the other "You" as a whole person with independent consciousness. Through dialogue, the two sides can achieve spiritual intercommunication and spiritual encounter, thus realizing the two-way communication and interaction between subjectivity.

Real education requires real dialogue, in which both teachers and students have to reach an innocent attitude, respect each other's subject status, and express their true inner thoughts. It is these frequent exchanges and interactions that make teachers and students come into contact with each other and understand each other, so as to achieve the spiritual communion between them and realize the transformation from "I-it" to "I-Thou" relationship. The dialogue of equality here is a rational one. The equal dialogue mentioned here is a rational dialogue, a joint exploration of both sides, and a process of mutual growth.

### **1.2.3 Teacher-student relationship is a pair of contradictory and unified conflicts**

To accomplish certain teaching contents in the whole teaching process there must be interaction and communication between teachers and students together. The two belong to two different subjects, they are opposites; but they cannot be separated, they are unified, as a contradictory community. However, the main aspect should be the unified aspects of teacher-student relationship, including the educational-teaching relationship and emotional-communication relationship between the two. Education and teaching relationship is the core and focus of the whole teacher-student relationship, the teacher is the guide and facilitator in the teaching process, and the student is the independent subject in this process. This education and teaching relationship is objective, and both sides maximize their subjective power to form a unified synergy, so as to achieve the harmonious development of teacher-student relationship. In addition to the relationship between teachers and students, there is also an emotional exchange relationship arising from the communication and interaction between teachers and students, which makes the two sides together in a certain emotional atmosphere, thus enhancing mutual understanding and communication between teachers and students and improving the quality of teaching.

### **1.2.4 Teacher-student relationship is constantly developing and changing**

Everything in the world is constantly changing and developing, and the teacher-student relationship is also a pair of things that are constantly developing and changing. In the past, teachers were the mainstay of education, ignoring the initiative of stu-

dents, which intensified the conflicts and contradictions between teachers and students. The emergence of quality education has changed this phenomenon, and teachers' educational concepts are constantly updated, focusing more on students as developing human beings with great potential for development and on their individual development. Therefore, the new era should follow the national education philosophy, give full play to the main position of students, and implement the educational purpose of cultivating comprehensive development of talents into specific teaching practice.

## **2. The problems and causes of teacher-student relationship**

### **2.1 Problems of the current teacher-student relationship**

#### **2.1.1 The traditional "teacher-centered" status quo still exists**

What a harmonious teacher-student relationship embodies is a strong affinity between teachers and students. It is like the best relationship between the ruling group of Zhenguan during the reign of Emperor Taizong of Tang Dynasty - the harmony between the ruler and his subjects, the strong political centripetal force between them. Teachers and students, as two independent subjects, have their own consciousness and thoughts, but they should try their best to reach a harmonious relationship in order to achieve common teaching goals, teachers and students should meet in order to improve the quality of teaching. However, the "teacher-centered" concept that teachers play a dominant role in the whole teaching process is still dominant, and some teachers' sense of superiority increases rather than decreases, and they are unwilling to get in close contact and communicate with students either from the surface or from the heart, which leads to a lack of mutual understanding and communication between students and teachers. The lack of mutual understanding and effective communication between students and teachers hinders the construction of a new type of equal teacher-student relationship.

#### **2.1.2 Lack of emotional communication between teachers and students**

Martin Buber in "I-Thou" clearly pointed out that "the real human activity that makes the relationship immediate is habitually understood and misunderstood as emotion"<sup>[2]</sup>. The communication between teachers and students is not only the communication and transmission of knowledge, but also the intercommunication of emotions and ideas between them, through mutual trust and acceptance, which makes the whole teaching process more fluid. With the development of technology, students can obtain the knowledge they want anytime and anywhere with the help of the Internet and other means. However, some teachers are still immersed in the traditional classroom teaching mode, and the classroom is still dominated by the teacher's unilateral output of knowledge, not caring about the students' knowledge mastery, resulting in the phenomenon of "the teacher does not teach the knowledge that students want to get from the teacher, but the content that the teacher has taught students has been obtained from other ways". The traditional teaching methods of teachers "teaching" and students "learning" have been quietly transformed, and teachers' teaching is no longer the only way for students to obtain knowledge, which will definitely reduce the number of interactions between teachers and students, and is not conducive to the communication between teachers and students in terms of emotional exchange, resulting in the rigidity of teacher-student relationship. This is bound to reduce the number of interactions between teachers and students, which is not conducive to emotional communication between teachers and students and causes rigidity in teacher-student relationship.

#### **2.1.3 Serious interest-oriented relationship between teachers and students**

The school is a place of public welfare and service educational activities, and should treat every student fairly and impartially. However, due to the objective conditions, the classroom system can only be implemented on a large scale, so it is difficult for teachers to take care of every student in the class, and it is more necessary to rely on the students' self-awareness. But not all students have strong self-control and learning initiative, coupled with today's commercialized social background, which led to some parents to give teachers red envelopes and other ways to get the teacher's individual attention to the phenomenon, the so-called utilitarian teacher-student relationship is also born. What is worse is that some teachers take the initiative to solicit and accept bribes by virtue of their authoritative position as teachers, making the teacher-student relationship directly transformed into a monetary relationship. The interest-oriented teacher-student relationship seriously affects the normal teacher-student relationship, i. e. , confusing the boundary between teachers' rights and obligations, changing teachers' teaching to paid teaching, making substantial changes in the nature of teaching, not protecting the equal status of students, and straining the teacher-student relationship.

## **2.2 The causes of the current problems of teacher-student relationship**

### **2.2.1 The result of long-term exam-oriented education**

Long-term exam-oriented education overemphasizes students' test scores, and only determines success or failure by aca-

ademic performance, ignoring the balanced development of students. Teachers who can teach high scores are "good teachers", the so-called "top students" and "toppers" are "good students". The idea that test scores determine everything is still deeply rooted. The duty of teachers is to teach and educate people, not simply a tool for "teaching", but the purpose of teaching is to educate people. The real improvement of teaching quality should be the comprehensive and coordinated development of students' intellectual and moral education. The excessive one-sided focus on student achievement makes students unable to develop comprehensively, while the teaching level of teachers is not fairly evaluated, cultivating a large number of nerds who can only read, and when they leave the books and go to society, they will forget the teachers who once made them high marks, and the teacher-student relationship will be dimmed.

### **2.2.2 The influence of traditional "teacher dignity" values**

The teacher is the main subject of traditional education and teaching, in a position of guidance and dominance, and students can only follow the teacher's pace and learn according to the teacher's requirements. This concept of "teacher's dignity" does not regard students as an independent subject in the education process, and takes it for granted that teachers are the subject and students are the object, and the object must obey the subject, and students must accept the knowledge conveyed by teachers, which obviously forms an unequal relationship between teachers and students. However, in today's increasingly prosperous knowledge economy, the "indoctrination" teaching method can no longer meet the requirements of today's personalized teaching, and the traditional "teacher-dignity" view of teacher-student designation will make the teacher-student relationship conflict and tension between teachers and students.

### **2.2.3 Teachers' professional ethics are uneven**

Nowadays, the moral level of some teachers also shows a downward trend. We know that the profession of teaching should be pure and simple, good style and integrity is the most basic premise for teachers. Students can only "trust their teachers" if they are "close to their teachers", and teachers should be strict with themselves in order to win students' trust in themselves, so that the teaching effect can be as desired. In order to be loved and respected by students, teachers must have a certain moral cultivation and charisma. However, in the real world, utilitarianism is prevalent and unethical practices are prevalent throughout the education sector. As a result, individual teachers' values are affected, and they believe that the salary they earn is not proportional to their work.

## **3. The specific path of building new teacher-student relationship**

### **3.1 Strengthen the dialogue between teachers and students on an equal footing and build an intersubjective teacher-student relationship**

It is necessary to enhance communication and understanding between the two subjects, so as to have more effective dialogues between them. This requires that in the process of concrete actions and implementation, efforts should be made to change the traditional dichotomous interaction behavior between subject and object, the old concept of unequal status of teachers and students, and to fully respect the thinking ability of students as independent individuals while playing the role of teachers' guidance and direction. But at the same time, the construction of intersubjective teacher-student relationship as a process of mutual compatibility with each other does not say that the differences that exist between the two sides in the communication and interaction are simply excluded. If the inter-subjective teacher-student relationship is constructed in such a way that the two subjects are different from each other, the result will be alienation. Therefore, it can be said that "in essence, dialogue is not the opposition of one viewpoint to another, nor is it the imposition of one viewpoint on another, but a sharing of both sides. Through dialogue, teachers and students share knowledge, experience, wisdom, and the value and meaning of life".<sup>[3]</sup>

### **3.2 Insist on building equal and harmonious teacher-student relationship from the theory of materialistic dialectics**

First of all, the theory of materialistic dialectics firmly believes that all things in the whole world are connected to each other. Although teachers and students are two completely different and independent individuals, the teacher-student relationship, as a unified and complete whole, can show that these two subjects are connected to each other. Therefore, to build a harmonious new teacher-student relationship, it is possible for both teachers and students to work together to improve the problems now faced between teachers and students. As a teacher, we should be clear about our responsibility to cultivate students who are well-rounded in all aspects, and as a student, we should have our own independent consciousness and active thinking, be the master of learning, and reconstruct a harmonious and equal teacher-student relationship.

Secondly, materialistic dialectics also points out that the development of things is universal and objective, so the relationship between teachers and students is also changing with the times. In the past teaching process, the traditional concept of "teacher's dignity" accounted for a large part, but in the new curriculum reform requirements of the present, more attention is paid to the subjectivity of students, to build an "I-Thou" relationship in which teachers and students interact on an equal footing. In order to meet the requirements of the development of the times, it is also extremely important to establish a diversified education evaluation system. Appropriately evaluate each independent student subject with a developmental viewpoint, and minimize the emergence of a series of contradictory phenomena between teachers and students due to the final teaching and learning performance, so as to promote the harmonious and orderly development of the most basic relationship among all the elements of teacher-student relationship, namely the teaching relationship.

Finally, a careful analysis and understanding of the theory of commonality and individuality of contradictions will allow for a specific analysis and understanding of each individual subject existing in the objective reality of society, thus allowing for a more focused resolution of contradictions. There is not, and never will be, one educational norm or fixed educational guideline.<sup>[4]</sup> Students are not identical products produced on a factory assembly line. We should respect each student's individuality, teach them according to their abilities, be objective and fair in evaluating them, and resolutely oppose the "one-size-fits-all" approach to promote the integration of teacher-student relationships.

### **3.3 To insist on the correct values as the guide for the teacher-student relationship**

Although values as a social consciousness are determined by social existence, values themselves have a certain relative independence, which means that the right values will play a role in promoting social development. The ideas and values of Confucius, the great educator and thinker of ancient China, provide great theoretical guidance for building a harmonious teacher-student relationship today. Confucius especially emphasizes the role of human nature, and the core idea of "nature is similar, habit is distant" is the central embodiment of his thinking. It means that human nature is originally the same and similar, but it is because of the later "habit" that the gap between human beings is widened. Confucius takes human nature as the basis, and believes that every student's initial nature is similar, and that students' good or bad performance is the result of acquired learning, so we should learn to look at students with an appreciation and developmental perspective. Confucius took human nature as the starting point and believed that every student is a "talent". The most important thing is to reach out to the students and get inside their hearts, to carefully identify the unique personality characteristics of each student, to prescribe the right medicine, to teach them according to their abilities, and to discover their great potential. At the same time, Confucius also preached benevolence and love to students, and the teacher-student relationship was like father and son, encouraging and supporting each other in learning and life, which also opened the way for us to build a new harmonious teacher-student relationship today.

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