

Perspectives on Lifelong Learning in “A Record of Learning”*

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ABSTRACT Education has played an important role in cultural development throughout history. Especially nowadays, in the age of knowledge and economy, knowledge is constantly evolving while the important life issues facing individuals are shifting. Only continuous learning can help a person relish life while also enjoying the fruits of technology and civilization. “A Record of Learning” is an ancient Confucian treatise, as well as the earliest monograph on education among the cultural relics throughout the world. Even now, this treatise is of relevance in imparting wisdom regarding education. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the perspectives on lifelong learning in “A Record of Learning”. This study adopts the qualitative research methods of content and concept analysis. The study aims to address the following aspects of the text: theoretical, functional, teachers’ attitudes, linguistic aspects, teaching methods, guiding aspects, learning, teacher–student interactions and what should be avoided. In the thirteen sections in “A Record of Learning”, fifty-eight core concepts were found to inspire lifelong learning. The contributions of this study include reflection, analysis and discussion concerning lifelong education. It is anticipated that this study will be useful to those in the field of lifelong education, especially in the application of the educational concepts found in “A Record of Learning”.

INTRODUCTION

The treatise “A Record of Learning” is not only the earliest work in China focusing on education but is also the earliest in the legacy of literature in Eastern civilization and world cultures to provide in-depth knowledge regarding education. The treatise is part of the “Book of Rites”, which is a collection of Confucius’ teachings (551 BC ~ 479 BC) on rites written by 70 of his disciples and pupils rather than by one person in a single period of time. Parts of the work date back to the Qin Dynasty in China (221 BC) but it was completed at the beginning of the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC ~ 8 BC). The authors of the collection are unknown. Sima Guang, a famous writer and historian of the Song Dynasty (1019 AD ~ 1086 AD), who completed the very first chronological general history, “A Mirror for the Wise Ruler”, considered that the four most important treatises in the Book of Rites are “The Great Learning”, “The Doctrine of the Mean”, “A Record of Learning” and “A Record of Music”. This demonstrates the importance of “A Record of Learning”. Moreover, within Chinese culture and history, it stands as one of the important ancient books and records of Confucianism.

To help non-native Chinese speakers comprehend its content, the article contains 14 sections. The first section focuses improving social customs, a process which must begin with education. The second section describes the need to start with education in governing a nation and its people. The third section teaches the idea that other people can help with one’s learning.

The fourth section describes school systems, educational goals and the seven principles of education. The fifth section urges students to be diligent in making achievements in learning. The sixth section suggests that without teaching according to students’ aptitudes, learning cannot be achieved. The seventh section stresses that teachers must understand the factors that influence whether education is successful and they must be good at guiding students. The eighth section shows that teachers must identify students’ deficiencies in order to implement corresponding remedies and their language should be simple, graceful, pleasant, reasonable and inspiring.

The ninth section is about the importance of choosing teachers. The tenth section reveals the importance of revering the master and his teachings. The eleventh section focuses on the im-

portance of students asking questions and teachers answering their students' questions. The twelfth section states that teachers must become familiar with their students' condition before guiding them. The thirteenth section elaborates the argument that learning should proceed from the easy to the difficult and more complicated, step by step. The fourteenth section establishes that learning is the foundation for the way in which one conducts oneself, deals with affairs, settles down and gets on with one's pursuits.

In sum, "A Record of Learning" stresses that in ancient society everyone had to learn, whether young or old, senior or junior in a family or a clan, and even the sovereign king needed to learn. Also, learning required guidance from a teacher. This was the path towards a fruitful and harmonious life. According to this educational ideal, "A Record of Learning" is closely related to the idea of life-long education. It is also the origin of that idea, inspired by the perspective of using ancient ideas for today's reference. Thus, this issue is worth researching and studying in relation to modern society.

Literature Review

The literature on earlier studies on "A Record of Learning" can be summarized in terms of eight categories, each of which is discussed below. The first aspect is comparative research, with comparisons drawn from chapters of other ancient writings, such as "On Learning" by Xunzi (Zhong 1981a). The second aspect is philosophical discussions, such as: (a) an analysis of the meanings of education (Huang 1999); (b) a philosophical analysis of the social roles of teachers (Li 2010); (c) a philosophical discussion of the functions of education (Deng 2008). The third aspect is discussions of teachers' professionalism, including two dimensions: (i) inspiration for teachers' professional literacy (Zhang 2006); (ii) the professional abilities of teachers and applications of methods (Ding 2007). The fourth aspect comprises analyses and investigations of "characters" or "words" in the text (Chang 2008). The fifth aspect concerns analyses of teaching methods, including: (a) an empirical analysis of teaching techniques (Zhong 1981b); (b) a summary of teaching theories and principles from the text (Song 2002); (c) analysis of the language used in teaching in the text (Wei 2011). The sixth aspect relates to discussions of learning meth-

ods, such as applications and enlightenment in language education and the reformation of language courses. The seventh aspect covers theoretical comparisons with or inspirational discussions of various issues in modern education, leading to introspections on the ancient times and nowadays, including the following research directions: (a) introspection based on the viewpoint of phenomena in modern education (Xiang 2010); (b) interpreting certain educational ideas, such as humanistic education (Su 2008); (c) selecting a concept from the text and analysing it in terms of important issues in social cultural trends, for example, innovative thought (Yuan 2007), ethical education (Xu and Cui 2006), life education and teachers' views from the text (Fei and Zhou 2010) and interpreting them in light of the meaning and value of modernization. The literature review revealed that as yet no research has explored the perspectives regarding lifelong learning in "A Record of Learning". Thus, it is worthwhile examining the following aspects of the text: theoretical, functional, teachers' attitudes, linguistic aspects, teaching methods, guiding principles, learning, teacher-student interactions and what should be avoided.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted content analysis, which is a qualitative research method, defining textual units and classifying them (Chang 2004). In other words, this study used "character", "term" and "sentence" as units, analysed every character, term and sentence and drew out perspectives and concepts related to life-long education, which were interpreted and summarized rigorously, as presented in the research results.

The research was undertaken in a series of steps. First, Chinese textbooks containing "A Record of Learning" were collected from universities in Taiwan, as were ancient books with commentaries on "A Record of Learning" in all past dynasties. An authoritative version of "A Record of Learning" was then selected as the text to be used in this study and a cross-comparison was undertaken of the meanings of words among the various editions of "A Record of Learning". In addition, if different interpretations were found in the various editions, reference was made to the ancient books with commentaries for further comparison and the identification of meaning with the aim of deriving the most objective interpretation possible.

“A Record of Learning” was then analysed based on the meaning of the words and concepts employed. After the meaning of the words had been confirmed, the treatise was read word by word and the terms relating to lifelong learning were circled. Then a conceptual review was performed using the circled terms to check whether they were associated with the meaning of lifelong learning. If yes, the circles were kept; if not, the circles were removed. To no relevant terms were missed, after the circling process had been completed, a second conceptual review was performed for the non-circled terms to check if they were related to lifelong learning; those that were related to lifelong learning were circled. To develop a clear and specific basis for quotations and interpretations, the circled terms were coded.

There are fourteen paragraphs in the article and these were first coded using capital letters, from A to N. In each paragraph, the circled terms were separated based on punctuation marks and numbers were assigned to them based on their order of circling. For example, in the third paragraph, there is a comma after the fifth character and there are three characters after the comma. These were coded as C:1 and C:2, where C represents the third paragraph, the colon is the conjunction of the paragraph code and the term code, “1” represents the first circled term in the third paragraph, “2” represents the second circled term and so on.

The extraction of core concepts, concept organization and interpretation were then undertaken using the terms previously identified. The idea of core concept extraction was to find the core concepts related to the meanings of the circled terms for the purpose of simplification and present them in list form for ease of reading. Concept organization was undertaken to integrate similar concepts. For example, if there were two different circled terms in two different paragraphs or in the same paragraph with different codes but similar meanings, these two terms were placed on the same line and their codes listed. The interpretation involved expressing the classical language using modern language without changing the meaning. Interpretation into modern language was highlighted using italic numbers. For example, because the first section in the thirteenth paragraph is an interpretation, the “1” in 13:1 is italicized. In contrast, the second section in the thirteenth paragraph is based on the classical text and thus the “1” in 12:1 is not in italics.

RESULTS

Based on the analysis, it was found that in the fourteen paragraphs of “A Record of Learning”, there are fifty-eight core concepts related to inspiring lifelong learning. These are then further aggregated into four stylized dimensions: the philosophical perspective, the teacher’s professionalism perspective, the learner perspectives and the perspective of the relationship between teacher and learner. Each of these is addressed in turn, detailing the core concepts and giving the coding in parentheses.

The Philosophical Perspective

In terms of theoretical aspects, a total of eight core concepts were discovered in eight paragraphs of the treatise and the total number of characters of the circled terms with their respective meanings represents 15.37 percent of the article. The concepts are listed below:

“All fields in life are fields for learning” (F: 13)
“Learning goals are life goals” (E: 5), (E: 17)
“New knowledge should be learned” (B: 2) and
“truth” (D: 13), *“goodness”* (C: 2) and
“the beauty of learning should be experienced” (C: 1)

“Learning is the foundation of life” (N: 14)

In terms of functional aspects, a total of five core concepts were identified from two paragraphs, with the total number of characters representing 6.3 percent of the complete article, as follows:

“Facilitating life growth” (D: 20)
“Facilitating introspection” (C: 11)
“Facilitating independence” (C: 13)
“Learning about principles of life” (D: 13)
“Improving civilization and creating cultural atmosphere” (D: 16)

The Perspective of Teacher Professionalism

There were five core concepts related to teachers’ attitudes in five paragraphs, the total number of characters of the circled terms for which comprises 3.3 percent of the complete article. The concepts are:

“Observing students’ learning conditions” (E: 12)
“Patiently listening to students’ expressions” (L: 3)
“Never talking on and on” (F: 24)
“Being modest and having empathy” (A: 5)

"Discovering students' potential" (I: 2)

For linguistic aspects, a total of four core concepts were discovered in three paragraphs and the total number of characters of the circled terms with this meaning represents 5.6 percent of the whole treatise. The concepts are as follows:

"Making linguistic expressions simple and to the point" (H: 16)

"Making linguistic expressions exquisite and wonderful" (H: 17)

"Directing students to think and to formulate full expressions before responding" (K: 19)

"Explaining the answers only when students are not able to find them" (L: 4)

Turning to teaching methods, there were seven core concepts drawn from four paragraphs. The total number of characters of the circled terms with this meaning represents 4.9 percent of the article. The concepts are:

"Setting up teaching goals" (F: 1) and *"after-class assignments"* (F: 2)

"Not going beyond the students' level" (G: 4)

"Ensuring teaching content is complete" (G: 12)

"Keeping teaching content clear so that students can understand easily" (G: 33)

"Training students to learn from the basics" (M: 1)

"Developing students' ability to digest information" (N: 3)

Finally, five core concepts were found for guiding aspects relating to two paragraphs, with the total number of characters comprising 4.9 percent of the article, as follows:

"Getting to know students' psychological states" (H: 10)

"Seeing learning difficulties from the students' perspective" (I: 1)

"Helping students to improve their weaknesses in learning" (H: 11)

"Enhancing students' learning advantages" (H: 13)

"Allowing students to copy their teachers' ability" (H: 15)

The Learner Perspective

In relation to learning, a total of eleven core concepts were discovered in three paragraphs. The total number of characters of the circled terms with this meaning comprises 8.8 percent of the complete article. The concepts are as follows:

"Students should be modest" (G: 7) and *"studious"* (G: 21)

"Students should master basic abilities" (F: 4) and *"use them flexibly"* (F: 5)

"When students are worried about their learning, they will blame their teachers" (F: 32)

"When students encounter difficulties in learning and do not know the benefits of learning" (F:33),

"successful learning is impossible" (F: 36)

"Students' common problems in learning include: aiming too high" (H: 4),

"having limited knowledge" (H:5),

"experiencing being like a rolling stone" (H: 6) and

"giving up halfway" (H: 7)

The Perspective of the Relationship between teacher and Learner

For teacher–student interactions there was a total of eight core concepts in five paragraphs. The total number of characters of the circled terms with this meaning represents 7.9 percent of the entire treatise. The concepts are listed below:

"Unhurried learning" (E: 11) and *"creating a learning support system"* (F: 18)

"Learning from each other" (G: 5) and *"growing together"* (C: 14)

"Guiding students without forcing them so that they can feel the tenderness of their teachers" (G: 26)

"Encouraging students without placing pressure on them so that they can feel relaxed and free" (G: 27)

"Directing students to think instead of giving answers to them directly, for this method can inspire them to think deeply" (G: 28)

"Joyfully resolving students' problems in learning" (K: 12)

Finally, with regard to aspects that should be avoided in teaching, a total of five core concepts were discovered in one paragraph, with the total number of characters comprising 6.5 percent of the complete article. The concepts are as follows:

"Talking on and on" (F: 24)

"Teaching students using rote learning, thus students cannot truly understand the content taught" (F: 23)

"Speeding up to catch up" (F: 25)

"Not caring whether students have learned something" (F: 26)

"Teaching without considering students' actual level" (F: 27)

DISCUSSION

Thousands of years after “A Record of Learning” was written, although time and space have changed dramatically, the wisdom and meaning of the educational ideas can still be recognized today. The overall educational essence is that teachers can play a guiding role, pay attention to their interactions with students and expect them to do well. The implied meaning is that learning is a process that follows from teacher–student interactions. This also shows the importance of a harmonious and happy learning environment, which was highly praised in the ancient autocratic social system. This feature can be interpreted as the source of the notion of the friendly campus.

According to the results, 91.2 percent of the content is related to the teacher’s role in life-long education, of which 24.5 percent is related to the perspective of teacher’s literacy (21 items), followed by the perspective of the philosophy of life-long education (13 items) and that of the teacher–student relationship (13 items). Overall, the proportions of the forty-seven core concepts addressing the teacher’s professional capability and the eleven core concepts for the student’s learning capability are 81.03 percent and 18.97 percent respectively, showing that teachers play a key role in the educational quality of life-long education.

From a philosophical perspective, the educational idea of “A Record of Learning” is that learning includes all experiences in life, from the basics of life to the higher goals of life. One should, through continuous learning in life, continue to absorb new knowledge in order to improve one’s capability for introspection, facilitate independence and growth, move towards the ideal state of life (true, good and beautiful) and further achieve one’s goals in life and self-realization.

From the aspect of teacher literacy, “A Record of Learning” stresses that teachers should have a friendly attitude. In teaching, they should begin by understanding their learners, select appropriate teaching methods based on their learners’ actual level and maintain an attitude of empathy and respect. In this way, they will be able to fulfil their responsibility of benefiting learners in education, so that learners can learn with confidence in an ideal setting in which they are respected, giving them the opportunity to advance and employ their potential and abilities.

“A Record of Learning” indicates that if a learner wants to accomplish something in learning, he or she must first understand the meaning of learning, reflect on his or her shortcomings and make corresponding improvements and study diligently with modesty, mastering essential competences and marching towards the goal of flexible application.

From the perspective of teacher–learner interactions, psychologically, the focus is on a harmonious and pleasant environment. In other words, teachers should be friendly to their learners, who can thus feel free and easy. In learning without pressure from teacher, learners can have greater space to think and consider their learning in greater depth, as well as experiencing the value and fun of learning in a setting with a pleasant atmosphere and positive support.

Teachers play a key role in life-long education. They must have empathy and respect, care about each learner’s learning style and teach each learner based on the individual’s level. Thus, in the process of learning, all learners can receive positive support and patient guidance from their teachers to benefit their learning. This is the important inspiration from “A Record of Learning” from the perspective of life-long education.

CONCLUSION

The perspective on life-long learning embedded in “A Record of Learning” with regard to individuals concerns the process of continuous self-growth and use of one’s potential; with regard to the aspect of social functions. It stresses the importance of cultivating a supportive atmosphere. Thus, the role of teachers is especially important in relation to attitudes, methods, use of language and interactions with students. The key is to create a harmonious atmosphere, have empathy, teach joyfully, consider students’ level and not pressure the students, thus increasing students’ willingness to learn and guiding them to learn on their own initiative. The focus is on mastering the basics and the ability to apply the basics, which can further enhance students’ motivation and inspire them to make their lives more meaningful. All these are important inspirations regarding lifelong learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The ideas and methods of the four educational perspectives, summarized in this study from ancient texts about education, can be ap-

plied to contemporary lifelong learning. The thirteen core concepts of the first perspective “the philosophic perspective” can be explored and researched further, for the purpose of increasing the public’s awareness of the value of lifelong education. The twenty-one core concepts of the second perspective – the teacher’s professional point of view “and the thirteen core concepts of the fourth perspective – that of the relationship between teacher and learner” are related to the teacher’s teaching methods. Lifelong education institutions should therefore integrate their conversations with teachers to produce a teaching guide with the aim of achieving their mutual educational goals. For the third perspective – that of the learner “a guide for learners can be produced by integrating the results after careful analysis of the eleven core concepts. With this guide, learners can develop appropriate expectations and effectively acquire knowledge during their lifelong education, improving their skills as they progress. A total of 58 items can be used in a questionnaire and the results used as a reference for lifelong education in teaching and administration.

NOTE

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