

On the Shaping of the Caring Image of Primary School Teachers

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Abstract: Primary education is a critical stage in a person's formative years, and the image of primary school teachers has a profound impact on the development of individual students and the broader educational ecosystem of society. This paper explores the shaping of the caring image of primary school teachers, delving into the unique significance of such an image and systematically outlining strategies for its development. The aim is to provide theoretical guidance and practical insights for the professional growth of primary school teachers and the practice of primary education.

Keywords: Primary School Teachers, Caring Image, Inner Care.

1. The Caring Image and the Caring Image of Primary School Teachers

(1) Caring

The term “image” in Chinese generally refers to the overall impression or external manifestation of a person or thing in others' minds. It encompasses both visible external characteristics, such as clothing, posture, and facial expressions, as well as deeper intrinsic qualities, value systems, and behavioral patterns. In interpersonal communication and social interaction, image serves as a bridge for communication and an important vehicle for building trust and conveying values. “Care” is a profound emotional attitude and behavioral orientation rooted in sincere concern for and appreciation of others' well-being, manifested through actions of understanding, acceptance, support, and assistance. Noddings' care ethics theory asserts that genuine care is not a one-sided act of giving but requires two-way interaction to build sustained relationships [1]. Care is not merely sympathy or pity; it encompasses respect, equality, trust, and responsibility, representing a positive model of interpersonal interaction. In the field of education, care is regarded as the core of humanistic educational philosophy, emphasizing that education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but also the communication of hearts and the mutual nourishment of lives between people.

(2) Caring Image

Combining “caring” with “image,” the “caring image” refers to a positive, trustworthy, and approachable impression formed in students' minds, with caring as its core trait. This image is not a deliberate pretense or performance but the organic unity of the teacher's intrinsic caring qualities and their external behavioral expressions.

(3) Caring Image of Elementary School Teachers

When applied to the “caring image of elementary school teachers,” this concept becomes even more rich and specific. The elementary school stage is a critical transitional period for children as they move from family to society, and it is the foundational stage for the comprehensive development of cognition, emotions, willpower, and personality. As educators who spend the most time with children and have the most direct influence on them during their school years, elementary school teachers' images hold special importance. The caring image of elementary school teachers is not merely about

superficial traits such as friendliness, patience, and a smile. At a deeper level, it reflects the teacher's attention to the individual life state of elementary school students, sensitivity to their growth needs, trust in their developmental potential, and the comprehensive qualities of understanding, respect, guidance, and assistance demonstrated on this basis.

The core of this image lies in the fact that teachers are no longer merely authorities on knowledge and disseminators of information, but rather companions, guides, and guardians of students' growth. The outward manifestations of a primary school teacher's caring image certainly include a gentle tone of voice, encouraging eye contact, patient listening, and timely smiles-positive facial expressions and body language. However, these are merely the tip of the iceberg; what is more crucial is the teacher's inner qualities of care and sense of responsibility. This inner care means that teachers genuinely prioritize students' well-being, are willing to invest time and effort to understand each child, comprehend their struggles and challenges, and share in their joys and successes. This sense of responsibility drives teachers to continuously reflect on their educational practices, strive to enhance their professional competence, and provide students with higher-quality, more personalized educational services. It is precisely this inner, sincere care and weighty sense of responsibility that, like a soul, transforms a teacher's outward image from hollow to rich, three-dimensional, and compelling, thereby truly shaping a caring image that is worthy of respect and trust.

Therefore, understanding the caring image of elementary school teachers requires going beyond a simple endorsement of the external label of “good teacher” and delving into teachers' educational philosophies, value orientations, emotional attitudes, and behavioral habits. It involves recognizing that this is a professional image that is centered on promoting students' comprehensive development, with inner care and a sense of responsibility as its core, and is continuously manifested and consolidated through daily educational and teaching practices.

2. The Unique Significance of Shaping the Caring Image of Elementary School Teachers

In the elementary school education stage, shaping the caring image of teachers is not an optional task but holds

profound and unique significance. It concerns the healthy growth of individual students, the realization of teachers' professional value, and the overall optimization of the elementary school education ecosystem.

(1) The caring image is the fundamental requirement for promoting students' comprehensive, healthy, and personalized development

The primary school stage is a critical period for children's physical, psychological, and social development. Children are like raw jade that needs careful nurturing and guidance. A teacher who focuses solely on grades may use uniform standards to "force a square peg into a round hole," suppressing students' individuality and creativity, and even causing some students to feel frustrated, anxious, or even develop a dislike for learning due to their inability to meet the standards. In contrast, elementary school teachers who embody a caring image can "see" the uniqueness of each student. They understand that every child has their own strengths and pace of growth. Some children may temporarily lag behind academically but excel in areas such as art, sports, or interpersonal skills; others may be introverted and struggle with self-expression but possess a rich and sensitive inner world. Such teachers do not hastily label children as "poor students" or "problem children," but instead patiently observe, understand, and identify their needs, encouraging them to grow in their own way. In this caring educational environment, students are more likely to feel a sense of security, belonging, and self-worth, enabling them to approach learning and life with a more positive mindset. This fosters harmonious development across cognitive, emotional, and social domains, helping them grow into unique, well-rounded individuals.

(2) The image of caring helps to restore the dignity of the teaching profession and enhance teachers' professional well-being.

For a long time, society's evaluation of teachers has often been simplified to "graduation rates" or "report cards," which has led some teachers to fall into the trap of "score-oriented thinking," resulting in high work pressure and strong feelings of professional burnout [2]. Cultivating a caring image elevates teachers' roles from mere "score judges" to "life companions." When teachers focus on students' holistic development and genuinely care for each child, the rewards they receive are not only academic progress but also the children's genuine smiles, trusting gazes, and heartfelt respect and affection. This emotional connection and feedback are irreplaceable by any material reward. When teachers feel that they are truly influencing and changing children's lives and see them improve under their care, their sense of professional value and achievement significantly increases. This inner sense of fulfillment and happiness serves as a powerful motivator to resist burnout and sustain work enthusiasm. Additionally, a caring teacher image is more likely to earn the respect and recognition of students, parents, and society, thereby enhancing the social status and professional prestige of the entire teaching community.

(3) A caring image helps improve the overall quality and depth of elementary education

Elementary education is the foundation of basic education, and its quality directly affects the overall level of national literacy. If elementary education remains stuck at the level of knowledge and test preparation training, the students it produces may have high scores but low practical abilities, lacking a well-rounded personality and the capacity for sustained development. The widespread cultivation of a

caring teacher image signifies a fundamental shift in educational philosophy, from "knowledge-centered" to "student-centered." This shift will prompt schools to place greater emphasis on individual differences among students, offer more diverse courses and activities, and foster a more democratic, equitable, and caring campus culture. As more teachers embody a caring image, the entire elementary education environment will become warmer, more positive, and more vibrant, driving the transformation of elementary education from "having access to education" to "receiving quality education," thereby achieving the fundamental goal of nurturing students and cultivating future citizens who are well-rounded, socially responsible, and innovative.

3. Strategies for Shaping the Caring Image of Elementary School Teachers

(1) Cultivating Inner Care and Sense of Responsibility to Lay the Foundation for a Caring Image

The core of a teacher's caring image lies in their inner qualities, namely sincere caring emotions and a strong sense of responsibility. Without these two as a foundation, outward smiles and patience will be nothing more than hollow performances. Therefore, the primary strategy for shaping a caring image is to focus on cultivating teachers' inner qualities.

1) Update Educational Philosophy and Establish a Holistic Development Perspective

Teachers must deeply recognize that the purpose of education is not merely to produce test-taking machines but to promote the comprehensive, harmonious, and sustainable development of every student. This requires teachers to actively study modern educational theories, particularly humanistic and constructivist theories that emphasize the student's central role and holistic development principles. They must deeply understand the characteristics and of children's physical and mental development during the elementary school stage and recognize that every child is a developing, unique individual with immense potential. Only when teachers genuinely embrace and internalize the educational philosophy of "comprehensive development" will their caring behaviors have a solid theoretical foundation and sustained motivation.

2) Enhancing empathy and emotional intelligence

Caring begins with understanding. Teachers must strive to enhance their ability to think from the students' perspective, attempting to feel their joys, sorrows, confusion, and struggles. This requires teachers to set aside their adult sense of superiority and judgmental mindset and approach students with a childlike heart. This can be achieved through training methods such as role-playing and scenario simulation, or by consciously observing and experiencing students' emotional responses in daily life. The development of empathy enables teachers to more keenly discern students' needs, making their caring behavior more targeted and heartfelt.

3) Strengthening a Sense of Responsibility and Professional Ethics

A strong sense of responsibility is the key driving force behind teachers' sustained efforts to provide care. Teachers must recognize that their responsibility extends beyond imparting knowledge to safeguarding students' growth and shaping their character. They should align students' development with their professional mission, understanding that even the smallest acts of care can have a profound impact

on students' lives. Teachers can reinforce their sense of professional responsibility and mission through activities such as reciting the teacher's oath, studying the exemplary deeds of outstanding teachers, and participating in teacher ethics and conduct initiatives.

(2) Balancing universal and personalized care to enrich the connotation of the image of care

The image of care that teachers project should combine both universal and personalized characteristics. Universality means that care should cover every student in the class, without omission or favoritism, while personalization means that care should be adjusted according to each student's uniqueness to meet their individual needs. How to embody these two connotations in daily teaching is an important practical aspect of shaping the image of care.

1) Universal Care

Teachers should create a fair and inclusive classroom atmosphere and convey a clear message to all students: the teacher cares about everyone. This is reflected in the distribution of opportunities to ask questions in class, ensuring that students of different levels have the chance to participate, as well as in seating arrangements, considering the needs of different students and placing them in appropriate positions. Teachers can emphasize through group activities or class meetings that the classroom is a family where everyone should help one another and grow together. Teachers should pay attention to the basic conditions of all students, such as whether they arrive on time, their mental state, and whether they follow the rules. For students exhibiting unusual behavior, teachers should promptly inquire and offer care. This universal concern allows students to feel the teacher's basic care, which is the first step in building trust. Though seemingly trivial, this foundational care enables students to sense the teacher's concern for their overall well-being.

2) Personalized Care

The prerequisite for personalized care is recognizing each student's unique qualities, and teachers must possess a sensitivity to care [3]. Teachers need to understand students through various channels, such as reviewing student records, communicating with previous teachers, interacting with parents, observing students' behavior in class and during breaks, and conducting individual conversations with students. Special attention should be given to students' interests, personality traits, learning styles, family backgrounds, and potential challenges. Based on their understanding of students, teachers should consciously implement differentiated strategies in their teaching. For students who struggle academically, provide additional tutoring and practice; for students who excel academically, offer advanced learning tasks. Beyond academics, every student will encounter different emotional challenges and behavioral issues during their growth. Teachers need to provide targeted support based on each student's specific circumstances. Teachers should understand the underlying reasons behind a student's behavior and then provide individualized education to teach them appropriate coping strategies.

3) The integration of universality and personalization

Universal care provides the foundation and platform for personalized care, while personalized care makes universal care more in-depth and effective. Teachers need to flexibly balance the relationship between the two in their daily teaching. Through this integration, teachers can ensure the breadth of care while achieving its depth, thereby shaping a

caring image that is both fair and full of humanity.

(3) Practicing the three core elements of care—"seeing," "accepting," and "responding"—to demonstrate concrete actions of care

"Seeing," "accepting," and "responding" are the core elements of teachers' caring behavior. They are interrelated and together form a complete chain of care [4]. Concretizing and practicing these elements are key action steps in shaping the image of teacher care.

1) "Seeing"

In the context of large class sizes, teachers must first ensure they "see" every student. This means that in the classroom, during activities, or even when simply encountering students in the hallway, teachers should notice each child's presence and express their attention through eye contact, nods, or other gestures. This prevents certain students from remaining "invisible" for extended periods. Teachers must not only "see" students' presence but also discern their uniqueness, using keen observation to uncover each child's personality traits, interests, strengths, and challenges. Additionally, when dealing with students who struggle to express their feelings verbally—especially younger students—teachers must develop the ability to "read" emotions and needs through non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, body language, and changes in tone. Furthermore, educational care should not only focus on students' shortcomings but also promptly recognize every effort they make, no matter how small the progress, and provide ample affirmation and encouragement, enabling students to gain the motivation and confidence to grow through being "seen."

2) "Acceptance"

Teachers should clearly recognize that every student will exhibit flaws and shortcomings during their growth process, which is a normal part of development. They should not completely dismiss a student simply because they made a mistake or performed poorly. Just as one accepts a person's strengths, one should conditionally accept their weaknesses and believe in their ability to improve. An important aspect of care is accepting the other person rather than projecting oneself onto them. Projecting one's own experiences onto others may result in manipulation and control [5]. Teachers should respect and appreciate the differences among students, whether in personality, ability, interests, or family background. They should not impose a single standard on all students or compare students with others. Additionally, they should acknowledge students' right to express negative emotions such as anger, sadness, or fear, without denying or suppressing them, but rather guiding them to release and manage their emotions in appropriate ways. When teachers truly accept students' imperfections, respect individual differences, and embrace negative emotions, they create a safe psychological environment for students, allowing them to lower their guard, reveal their true selves, and grow healthily in an atmosphere where they are not afraid of making mistakes or exposing their weaknesses.

3) "Responding"

Responding to the needs that are "seen," teachers must promptly address the needs they observe in students, whether academic, emotional, or related to daily life. Responses can take the form of verbal comfort, encouragement, or guidance, or practical assistance. Teachers who practice an attitude of "acceptance" toward students must also translate this into concrete actions, transforming understanding and acceptance into tangible care, so that students can genuinely feel the

support they receive through these responses. It is important to emphasize that educational responses should not be mere consolation or sympathy but should be constructive, guiding and inspiring students to find solutions to their problems and facilitating their growth and development. Additionally, the timeliness and appropriateness of responses are equally important. Timely feedback allows students to feel the teacher's ongoing concern, while appropriately balancing the extent of intervention ensures necessary support while fostering students' ability to independently solve problems, avoiding over-intervention that could lead to dependency, and achieving a balance between care and autonomous growth.

The three elements of “seeing,” “accepting,” and “responding” work together to form the complete process of teacher care behavior. The consistent practice of these three elements will make the teacher's image of care more concrete, vivid, and credible, truly internalizing it as a warm and trustworthy symbol in students' hearts.

4. Conclusion

The shaping of the caring image of elementary school teachers is a vivid embodiment of the return of education to its true nature, which is rooted in the sincere care and responsibility of teachers for their students, and is reflected in every detail of daily education and teaching. From the cultivation of inner caring quality, to the balance of universal and personalized care, to the practice of “seeing”, “accepting”, “responding”, each step carries the value of students'

growth. Each step of the way carries the value of student growth. This image is not a static template, but a living organism that is constantly enriched and naturally grows in the interaction between teachers and students, which can not only warm up the students' childhood and help them develop comprehensively, but also allow teachers to reap the value and happiness of their profession in the process of educating people. When more elementary school teachers take care as the base color and interpret the temperature of education with actions, elementary school education can really become a fertile soil to nourish life and light up the future.

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