

How Can Teacherhood Achieve Self-Determination? The Historical Background and A Recent Change in Light of the Five-Tier Grading System of the Nanyang Public School Normal College

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Abstract: The introduction of a teacher education system based on cultural subjectivity is among the best proposals that have been made under the new era for the development of high-quality education in China. The author is studying the Five-Tier Grading System as a specific training and testing program of the Nanyang Public School Normal College, which was the forerunner of the contemporary government-run normal education in China, and uses the historical institutionalism and textual analysis methodological approaches to deeply examine what it can be considered as an institution of a morally and academically advanced training system, a knowledge and practice incorporated system and a unified evaluation system and how it is rooted in the Confucian culture. The results indicate that the Five-Tier Grading System is not merely a knowledge evaluation system but a complete education system that involves moral growth, acquisition of knowledge, practical skills, and social accountability, hence a holistic approach in building a teacher personality. The present work critically builds upon the historical knowledge to tackle the current challenges and tries to create a model of training objectives of normal students, which will be called Three-Dimension and Five-Phase, to assist in resolving the current challenge in normal education, including a lack of cultural subjectivity and training goal uniformity. The framework is stated clearly in terms of progressive developmental indicators founded upon three critical dimensions of the physical body of a teacher, knowledge of a teacher, and the manners of the teacher to form the ideological basis to create localized discourse systems of teacher education and find out the progress of teacher education with Chinese characteristics creatively integrating the spirit of the traditional education with the current needs of the education.

Keywords: Nanyang Public School Normal College; Five-tier grading system; Cultural relativism; Personality of teachers; Training objectives

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1. Introduction

The quality of teachers is what drives the global educational competition. Having expanded over time and acquired a structure, the Chinese teacher education system is moving towards quantity and quality^[1]. Although policy documents, including China Education Modernization 2035 and the New Era Basic Education Strong Teacher Plan, have raised the standards and assessments, the concept of an ideal teacher can be broken down into quantifiable competencies^[2]. The conventional teacher image (the one that transmits information, eliminates doubts, and shapes individuals) is being pushed to the background, and there is a cultural identity crisis: can a teacher education system independent of culture be established in China with the development of globalization?

Existing models are based on the OECD competency model, but they pay attention to knowledge, skills, and effects. However, despite their practicality, they do not consider what the Chinese teacher needs to be. This culture is under threat as reducing ethics and sentiment to metrics might lead to the loss of culture. According to Ye Lan, the traditional pedagogy in China has to be grounded in the cultural heritage of the country and remind people of the old traditions of the land^[3].

That, in turn, makes the Nanyang Public School Normal College (1897) very important^[4]. The founder is Sheng Xuanhuai, and it has become the first organized normal school in China. The Five-tier Grading System would be a synthesis of Confucianism and formal education in which the conceptual principles of teaching were transformed into methodical and progressive instruction on how to cultivate a well-balanced character. Its resurrection will restore the teachings of teacher education founded on culture.

Very few sources are available: they are either macro histories or references to them in university stories, or they merely brush up on the notion of Sheng. Research in the domain of the philosophy of education of this system is minimal. The present paper will examine the Five-Tier Grading System as one of the ways to explore the traditional knowledge, cultural subjectivism, and establish a culturally responsive and modern training model.

2. Institutional restoration and philosophical interpretation of the Five-Tier Grading System

The Five-Tier Grading System is a well-organized program for grooming full-grown teachers and is officially outlined in the Charter of the Nanyang Public School Normal College.

The First Tier (introductory) needs to have been built on the solid pillars of education, potential, integrity, taste, big dreams, and calmness. This screening process tests the aptitude, character, and beliefs of the candidates in the same manner that the ancient Chinese proverb says it places more emphasis on character than ability.

Secondary Level (adaptation) focuses on hard work, student tolerance, adherence to rules, communication, and civic responsibility. This kind of evaluation may be applied to the assessment of initial professional ethics and conduct.

The Third Tier (competence) concentrates on the teaching skills: guidance, observance, organization, class management, and flexibility. It can be treated as a change between learning and professional practice.

The absence of pettiness, jealousy, arrogance, greediness, pretense, and irritability is required on the Fourth Tier (maturity). Real teacher conduct requires inner refinement.

The Fifth Tier excellence is noble character, acquired talent, large learning, correct behavior, and gentle

silence. Its goal is to find the ideal teacher-virtue, knowledge, and character, which should be in a state of balance.

Overall, there are three main qualities in the system. Firstly, slow improvement, i.e., the steady increase in skill levels up to the state of perfection. Secondly, holistic improvement, i.e., every step includes the skills of aptitude, attitude, ability, and cultivation, but does not provide the fragmented training. Lastly, virtuousness: the ultimate stage is the embodiment of the model teacher as per the conventional Chinese beliefs. As shown in **Table 1**, the five-level grading system clearly defines different developmental stages for teacher students.

Table 1. The five-level grading system for teacher education students

Level	Original Standard	Explanation	Core Focus
Level 1	Has a foundation in learning, solid character, genuine and sincere, ambitious, kind and calm	Entry Stage: Completion of studies of methods, has a potential; is real and sincere by nature; ambitious; the temper is quiet and serene	Entry Qualifications & Temperament
Level 2	Diligent and hardworking person, writes regularly, is trying to formalize the writing, is able to talk on a large level, prioritizes the well-being of people over the self	Adaptation Stage: Industrious and stubborn; they pay attention to their students; follow the rules; communicate well; can tell whether a problem is common or specific	Professional Attitude & Norms
Level 3	Good at guiding and encouraging, observant, organized, capable of handling situations and adapting	Competency Stage: The expert at providing advice, sharp observations, and intentional behavior; he/she is a competent professional who has a capacity to react to the requirements of the classroom in a flexible manner	Teaching Ability & Methods
Level 4	Unassuming, avoids competition, not arrogant, modest, polite, calm	The stage of maturity: There are no feelings of superiority, competition, arrogance but honesty and sincerity, absence of pretensions or aggressions.	Personal Cultivation
Level 5	Broad knowledge, precise conduct, calm and humble	The Mastery Stage has the following characteristics: strong personality and high-quality talent, good knowledge base, appropriate behavior, ambitious but modest, quiet and composed personality	Exemplary Teacher Model

3. Core logic and cultural roots of the Five-Tier Grading System

3.1. Core logic: A spiraling philosophy of teacher cultivation

The fundamental philosophy of education behind the Five-Tier Grading system is the notion of interconnected, progressive thinking ^[5]. At the initial steps of the training course, you will develop your own inner character, then your external teaching abilities, and finally come back to more profound personal development and spirituality to reach the space of the unity of the internal and external, virtue and talent. It is a procedure that accords with the tenets of the professional development of teachers that goes beyond technical ability and embraces the overall development of personality.

Moreover, this system is an embodiment of the amalgamation of knowledge and practice, knowledge and virtue. The process of gaining knowledge and teaching experience is tightly linked because it allows pupils to develop teaching abilities and simultaneously comprehend and assimilate what is referred to as the style of teaching. It is this integration that eliminates the gap between theory and practice that is rooted in the ancient Chinese philosophy of the oneness of knowledge and action.

To sum up, it also offers a developmental assessment model that is founded upon certain criteria and stages of development. All levels have their respective objective assessment criteria, and a student cannot be promoted beyond one until he/she has passed stringent tests. There are also directions of growth presented in the form of explicit directions, as well as persistent motivation in the form of feedback on how to break down long-term goals into achievable short-term goals, which is the essence of the contemporary developmental assessment.

3.2. Cultural roots: Institutional transformation of Confucian educational thought

The Five-Tier Grading System originates in Confucian educational practices that give it a strong cultural foundation ^[6-7]. It is founded on hierarchical concepts and the concept of progression, representing the practical implementation of Confucian principles of self-cultivation, family harmony, governance of state, and world peace, and spiritual growth into the area of common education. The requirements of honesty, sincerity, humility of the mind and the quietness of the spirit indicate the desire to achieve self-cultivation and correction of the heart; the prohibitions on arrogance and irascibility refer to self-restraint; the aspirations to promote the well-being of everyone and upright behavior and generosity speak of having a feeling of social responsiveness; and objectives to be broad-minded in learning and deep-minded in insight, high-minded in personality and subtle-minded in ability are consistent with the purpose of studying objects to gain knowledge and appreciating virtue during the process of learning.

To sum up, the Five-Tier Grading System is a modern version of the Confucian concept of the virtuous scholar in the light of the recent escalation of teacher professional growth. Its focus on the integration of teacher education within the traditional cultural practice can give valuable lessons in the current mainstream education.

4. Dialogue between past and present: historical limitations and contemporary implications

4.1. Historical limitations: Constraints of its era

The Five-Tier Grading System also had its drawbacks, as well as any other historic institution. Firstly, there was an elite mentality. The initial enrollment at the Nanyang Public School Normal College was only

30 students, and even the lowest tier was a rigorous filter that demanded much natural talent and early education. Only a small fraction of the students who made it to the fifth layer were lucky enough to be in possession of the red certificate. Such elitism might be explained by the following Qing purpose of planting national talent instead of popular normal education, which is one of the main contradictions between the current expectations of large-scale and high-quality but fair normal education. Implementation of the Five-Tier Grading System, which dreams of personality cultivation into the framework of a mass normal education system, is a problem that has not yet been solved.

The next issue is that the ethical evaluation was unclear. It was necessary to evaluate the inner virtues and personality states of students at the fourth and fifth stages, respectively, which were aimed at eliminating negative attributes and paying attention to the characteristics and temperaments. They depended on teacher recommendations and regular observations but lacked clear and replicable measurements. Such ambiguity might have been tolerable during the end of the Qing era when the student population was still small, and the connection between students and teachers was quite intimate, but such ambiguity is a significant issue in the modern-day massive educational system, in which there can be tens of thousands of students. The main question in the heritage of the Five-Tier Grading System is the assessment of moral perfection.

Moreover, knowledge structures have been prone to bias since time immemorial. Third-tier teaching skills, including guidance and flexibility, included a knowledge foundation that was more supportive of Chinese education when compared to Western education. The charter also did not mention any evaluation criteria regarding Western courses, and it provided a loophole within the development of a translation academy of Western books at the same time. Conversely, the volumes of specialized, pedagogic, and technical knowledge are growing exponentially, and modern standard students are compelled to learn them. The financial resources do not allow this; moreover, the educator's desire is not to follow the path of an educational system based on classics. But educators need to retain attention to the unity of knowledge and practice of the Five-Tier Grading System and make sure that learners get enough knowledge but are not alienated due to these amounts, or forget the first reason why they need to be taught.

4.2. Contemporary implications: Timeless wisdom

One of the most important meanings of the Five-Tier Grading System would be its application to the reform of regular education in the modern era, regardless of the history of the system. To begin with, the final aim of normal education is the formation of an ideal teacher character, which is the long-term formation of moral values, academic knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge, practical wisdom, and patriotism. The Five-Tier Grading System is like a reminder that there are no cognitive, emotional, or skills aspects of the normal students that should be cut off — it is a general perspective that is badly required in the modern normal education system.

Moreover, culture and identity are the spiritual grounds of teachers' professional development. Teacher professional confidence and cultural heritage in China are based on the profound awareness and inheritance of the civilizational legacy and educational experience of China. The Five-Tier Grading System has turned the Confucian scholar's evolution of cultural consciousness into the stairs of the conventional education that can be used effectively as a template to solve the problem of the cultural aphasia crisis in contemporary conventional education.

In summary, teacher education needs to be aligned with the national development policies and social demands. The professional development of teachers ought to be linked to the future of the country,

creating teachers who can react to the situation. It was this systemic understanding of the core and practical application that came at the end of the Qing transformation of Chinese learning as the core and Western learning as the practical application, and it is an intentional response to the issues of its time.

5. Contemporary transformation: A new framework for cultivating “Chinese-style teacher personality”

The use of the Five-Tier Grading System is imaginative as well as era-specific ^[8]. The attention is directed to the teachers of the feudal age towards those who will produce the new generation of people called people educators, whose main objective is to bring in virtues and skills into the nation. It appears that with regard to this fact, the Three-dimensional and Five-stage model of normal students, which includes the body, knowledge, and style of teachers, as well as the developmental stages, which include entry, development, intermediate, advanced, and excellence, should be developed. As shown in **Figure 1**, the three-dimensional and five-level professional development framework elaborates on the development stages of Chinese teacher students in the new era.

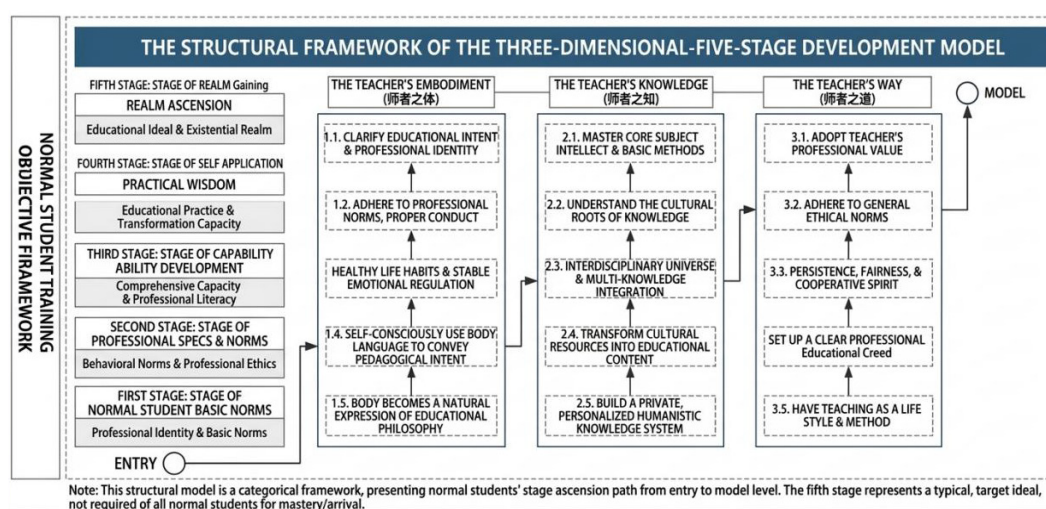


Figure 1. Three-dimensional five-level professional development framework

The teacher's embodiment is a proper phrase to understand the total physical and mental growth of students and their best behavior. At this level, it correlates with the initial stage of learning readiness, integrity, ambitious goals, and character pacification, but instead of a threshold, it is a lifelong thread of physical and mental growth. Besides the physical health and respectability of teachers, emotional stability, will, and personal spirituality are also included in this sphere. It is determined that conventional education, which is known today, tends to be more oriented toward teaching competence than toward the physical and psychological preparedness of the students to teach. The level of integrity and tranquility of the first tier helps one to recall that it is necessary to be a whole and healthy person to become a teacher. The progressive measures are stated in the following order: setting the goals of teaching and professional identity; adhering to the professional standards and courteous interaction; acquiring healthy habits and emotional regulation abilities; using body language to express the educational message intentionally; and natural manifestation of

educational philosophy through behavior.

The use of the notion of the teacher's knowledge suggests the cultural literacy and transformative potential of the students. This aspect is similar to the third tier concerning guidance and flexibility, and the fifth tier concerning extensive learning, extending the body of knowledge beyond the classics to the traditional cultural and disciplinary boundaries, to the transformation of knowledge. It includes not only the disciplines but also the cultural context and the capacity to translate the knowledge into educational resources. One of the biggest problems confronting contemporary students is not the lack of information but the inability to convert it into anything: there are those who are proficient at great volumes of information without knowing where it came from or what it was meant to do, and how to apply it to fashion the minds of the students. The shift among the guidance abilities in the third tier to the broad learning in the fifth tier reflects the move between the process of knowledge acquisition and creative application. The progressive phases would be as follows: acquiring basic knowledge and approaches in the field; awareness of cultural roots of knowledge; inter-disciplinary viewpoints and synthesis; conversion of cultural sources into educational content; formation of an individual educational knowledge system. This method proceeds via acquisition, comprehension, integration, transformation, and creation. At the final step, students become the active creators of information instead of passive receivers because they sense and arrange teaching in their own way.

Commitments and professional identity are appreciated by students, which is the teacher's way. This characteristic could be manifested in the second-tier emphasis on industry, patience, and social good, the fourth-tier dismissal of negative traits and characteristics, and the fifth tier on character and tranquility, as an integral part of one overall spiritual growth system of professional ethics, personality development, and value identity. It reflects an intense feeling of dedication to education, addressing the underlying question of why someone should teach and the spiritual motivation behind lifelong professional development. Contemporary normal school education is inclined to eliminate the spirituality of the path of a teacher by making it into principles and teacher emotions into statistics, and this de-mythologizes the spiritual nature of the path of a teacher. The concept of the fourth-tier wisdom tells us that the path to spiritual development requires getting rid of the internal obstacles that can help uncover the true heart of the authentic teacher. The phases of advancement include the realization of the importance of the teaching profession, adherence to professional ethics, developing patience, fairness, and teamwork, developing sound educational values, and acceptance of education as a way of life. It starts with mindfulness, then moves on to norms, and then continues to the development of character, belief formation, and finally to the practice of education as a vocation. The final stage implies that education has stopped being laborious but has turned into a lifestyle, and the instruction of children has taken a natural form of the person's existence; it is the embodiment of the fifth-tier ideal within the framework of the contemporary era.

6. Conclusion

Three dimensions and five stages together create the so-called Three-Dimensional and Five-Stage model. The basic reasoning is: progressive moral excellence, and here the five stages are seen as upward motion between entry and exemplar; holistic personality integration, in which case the three dimensions are developed simultaneously at every stage; rigid entry criteria, which repeat the emphasis on competence and intent in the first tier; and aspirational exemplars, which serve as signs of the peak of the fifth tier of virtue, ability, and

tranquility. It is also worth pointing out that such an organization does not resemble the competence models, but rather serves as a conceptual framework to comprehend the process of growth, not any kind of assessment of performance. One cannot anticipate all students attaining the fifth grade, in view of the fact that there have never been more than a small number of outstanding teachers, even in the best of times. Rather, it directs both students and teachers to the idea of constant development, and competence models can be applied to ensure that competencies are minimized, and moral excellence models can be used to encourage aspirational models. Teacher education standards in China must be extraordinarily strict, with rigorous competency training and lofty principles of personality.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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