

Mindfulness, Smile, Choice, Practice: Thoughts Based on Improving the Mental Health of Adolescent Secondary Vocational Students

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Abstract: Through the results of observations, questionnaires, tests, and other aspects from students, parents, teachers, schools, and society, we deeply explored the reality in the current education process of secondary vocational students, and actively thought about how to improve the current reality. We also explored the views and concepts more suitable for current students and times, created better educational and teaching activities to enhance students' perception and experience, so that students can truly enjoy the process, accumulate psychological resources and energy, and successfully complete the tasks of adolescent personality identity and development. Students can follow the self-education path of mindfulness, smile, choice, and practice, truly improve the level of mental health, and lay a solid foundation for becoming high-quality and highly-skilled talents.

Keywords: Morality and people cultivation; Mental health; Psychological experience; Mindfulness; Self-education

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1. Introduction

“Any practices that are not conducive to the realization of this goal must be resolutely changed ^[1].” The goal is to cultivate morality and cultivate people. Education is the process of cultivating morality and cultivating people. The famous British educational theorist, Whitehead said: “Students are flesh and blood, and the purpose of education is to inspire and guide their self-development ^[2].” This process includes students studying, finding jobs, and starting a family. As we all know, good psychological quality is the eternal driving force for student success.

First of all, in order to improve students' mental health level, students need to face up to the negative emotions of the moment, which means they need to maintain mindfulness at all times. Maintaining mindfulness requires studying psychology and training oneself. We start with the end in mind and work towards cultivating morality and cultivating people. The goals are to assist without causing trouble, to guide without controlling, and to support without messing things up, to pursue an education that respects individuals more, to give students

a better learning experience, to implement a higher level of “teaching in accordance with their aptitude,” and to promote students to become high-quality skilled talents.

2. Students require professional companionship and guidance, and understanding of themselves

In 2021, 623 people across the school responded to a mental health questionnaire, answering 130 questions. Among them, 37.72% were in secondary and higher vocational comprehensive classes, 17.01% were in junior high school comprehensive classes, 45.26% were in ordinary classes; 91.65% were boys, 75.6% were the only child, and 16.53% were from divorced families. **Table 1** shows the average scores of matrix questions for various types of questions. This was a questionnaire that requires in-depth thinking and interpretation, which necessitates further study from researchers. However, it can be seen that the scores for “daily feelings” and “emotions and behaviors in the past six months” are low. Among them, 6.26% said “I have thought about committing suicide” and 7.06% said “I intentionally hurt myself or attempted suicide,” which was quite shocking.

Table 1. Average scores of matrix questions for various types of questions

| Feelings in the family | Feelings in school | Daily feelings | Emotions and behaviors in the past six months | Possibility of related changes | Topics about self |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| 3.8 | 3.72 | 2.67 | 1.39 | 4.12 | 3.97 |

There are two more questions about self-existence, relationships, and sense of belonging.

- (1) I feel that if I disappear, the people around me will be better off.
- (2) I feel like I belong.

Regarding the sense of self-existence, 43.65% had a sense of existence, 27.29% were unsure, 19.05% had a weak sense of existence, and the proportion of people who are confused about life was still quite high.

For the sense of belonging, 19.52% thought that it is correct to have no sense of belonging, 27.77% were unsure, and 53.81% thought that they had a sense of belonging. It can be judged that they may be feeling guilty, depressed, etc., for a long time.

Learners who have been exposed to the emotional energy levels of the famous American psychiatrist Dr. David Hawkins must have seen the colorful picture of emotional energy levels, and know that various emotions have corresponding scores, such as courage, calmness, initiative, and tolerance, and the scores for them are all above 200, which are more positive emotions. The book *Positive Energy* clearly points out that if the body maintains a certain posture, subtle changes will occur in the mind. If students are trained to maintain a certain high-energy posture for a long time, such as smiling all the time every day, students will gain positive emotions.

Therefore, the companionship and guidance of a teacher who understands psychology is very important. Teachers can use various psychological techniques, such as the emotional masks of positive discipline, to allow students to identify their own emotions. Teachers can let students to draw a room with trees, wind, thunder, and lightning, and observe the current pressure, students can also use sandbox or keywords to make up stories and convey information. These can be written down to observe their language habits and thinking; for example, after a few minutes of imagery practice, the extroverted students all talked about it: “When you enter the door, there is a pile of money on the table, a room full of basketball shoes, and everything. There is a pink new house, and there is a bride; the house is dark; there is a small sapling in the room; the plane went to the desert, and there was a child there, playing with me...”; students can also be trained to look in the mirror and practice

saying the words “love yourself,” and in the process slowly accept their imperfections and reconcile with the inner child. These are all externalities of the soul.

Each student’s natural intellectual strengths are different, and each individual is unique. Intelligence can be developed, and there needs to be different teaching strategies for students with different intelligences. The theory of dominant intelligence proposed by Gardner describes that, for example, active students often have developed motor intelligence, and their learning and memory system is mainly action memory, which may also be accompanied by graphic intelligence. Confining such a student to sit quietly to study completely obliterated his or her nature, he or she might become a troublemaker and a disruptor in the eyes of teachers, and a disobedient child in the eyes of parents. In contrast, literacy, language, and math skills match with advantage intelligence, a memory and auditory type student will find learning process that requires sitting and concentration relaxed and joyful without much pressure, and is generally preferred by the teacher.

Multiple intelligence tests were done in several classes in a row, with the hope of getting a glimpse of where their genius lies and making students understand what they are better at. It is observed that the average value of the dominant intelligence of 61 students is the same. At the value between 40 and 57, the weakest are naturalistic intelligence and language intelligence. In addition, we also observed the differences between individuals, students generally have obvious advantages in 3 to 4 items and slightly weaker advantages in others. It is also observed that students with low overall class scores generally have lower intelligence.

Therefore, wise parents should allow their children to visit or intern in various employment units, or use language descriptions to let their children play based on their interests from an early age and gain knowledge about various jobs, etc. As we all know, this develops children’s intelligence to the class of superior intelligence. After graduating from junior high school, students can do part-time jobs during the summer to gain a deeper understanding of the compatibility of various jobs. In this way, students will have a clearer understanding of what the major requires, and it will be easier for them to gain motivation for learning. In this way, the job that supports the family is more likely to become a profession with social status in the future, and it is also more likely to become a vocation full of life meaning.

3. Parents need to change students’ behavior and learn educational concepts

In 2014, we borrowed the family education questionnaire of Dr. Dong Jinyu, “China’s number one parent-child educator,” to investigate and analyze the current family education status of students in 9 classes of the school (a total of 342 people), and to make a systematic review of the current situation of parents educating their children. Among them, there were 4 general classes (A), 4 middle and higher vocational comprehensive classes (B), and 1 junior high school comprehensive class (C). The three types of classes were formed strictly according to the high school entrance examination scores. Among the students in the general class, there were students who filled in the application form inappropriately and did not enter the high school comprehensive class, and there were also students who scored only over 100 points or even lower. The scores of the B and C classes were basically the same, with no significant difference.

There were 40 questions in the questionnaire, which were about parents’ educational philosophy and daily behavior descriptions. The questionnaire survey for students had three options: completely consistent, somewhere in the middle, and completely inconsistent. According to Dr. Dong’s questionnaire, the results showed that 4.3% of parents had 5 behaviors that should be strengthened and study should be strengthened; 25.4% of parents had 10 behaviors that should be vigilant; 69.3% of parents had 20 behaviors that parents must change, otherwise the child’s future will be ruined. Among the 342 students who participated in the survey, 20

families (5.8%) were extremely worried about their family education status based on “completely consistent” behavior, 85 families (24.9%) were vigilant, and 122 families (35.7%) needed education, and 112 families with good situation accounted for 32.7%. In addition, the results were compared and sorted based on the topic distribution of each student and the topic distribution of the class. As observed in **Table 2**, the averages for the item “completely consistent” among the nine classes are close, and there is no correlation between family education and student performance.

Table 2. Correlation between family education status and student performance

| Class | A1 | A2 | A3 | A4 | B1 | B2 | B3 | B4 | C1 |
|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|------|-----|-------|
| Average value of each class | 6.075 | 8.375 | 7.25 | 7.825 | 7.975 | 8.375 | 7.25 | 7.2 | 7.625 |
| Average of different types of classes | 7.381 | | | | 7.7 | | | | 7.625 |

Furthermore, when sorted by the number of options, the top ten descriptions surfaced. Each of these ten top-ranked opinions revealed behaviors such as controlling, blaming, complaining, and comparing that are not conducive to the healthy growth of students. So far, “I am always for your own good” ranked first, which can be heard repeatedly on various occasions. The latter two were those who believe that the child is not anxious at all in learning but they are anxious; they believe that the child’s future destiny is made by themselves.

It can be concluded from the above questionnaire that parents’ educational concepts must be revised and their behaviors must be changed. Fortunately, the Family Education Promotion Act was officially implemented on New Year’s Day last year. All types of parents and schools are disseminating new concepts of family education through various channels. For example, in Erikson’s eight stages of personality development, some students may not have received a sufficient sense of security or even basic trust in their infancy. They may feel that they have not been loved, have not developed a sense of boundaries, etc. It may be that, when one took the initiative to explore the world, he or she was always pulled back and did not gain a sense of initiative. It is also possible that during the education in school, one did not gain a sense of diligence and confidence in learning, thus they do not feel capable. However, when students reach adolescence, they need to establish a good identity. This is the most important time for identity restoration. They need to transcend their parents and become themselves, have an independent space at home, have the right to speak, and have the final say in their own affairs.

For example, this is an objective rule: the changing trend of interpersonal communication development from infancy to adolescence, the interaction with parents decreases with age, the interaction with peers increases rapidly with age, and the interaction ratio with teachers is basically maintained at about 20% in high school. Parents should let their children make friends, because the process of making friends is also a process of self-examination, a process of matching frequencies, because every friend is their mirror image. If the process is smooth, after the age of 18, they will be more willing to develop intimate relationship, which lasts until the end of life and affects their lifetime.

Therefore, parents should understand that adolescence is a time for students to reassemble themselves. It is not a rebellion at all, but a stage when they live a wonderful life and achieve success. This is the important mission of adolescence, and the parents have to make way for their growth and maintain supervision. At the same time, parents should take the initiative to get out of the way and take parents’ courses, especially those on emotion management, so as to prevent aggravating their children who are at the age of emotional overflow.

4. Teachers need self-education and emotional labor, and to be role models

When news spread on the Internet that a child jumped off a building, a lot of judgment began to pour out, saying that today's children are too fragile and cannot withstand the pressure. This should be thought from another angle: "Are the children too fragile or are their sensitivity heightened?" and "are parents and educators too insensitive and unaware?"

The emotional brain of adolescent children is in the development stage, which is the stage where emotions are easier to control. Therefore, teachers must enter the level of "emotional labor," and stop being numb as teachers. When facing students from different families and students with different talents and temperaments, teachers need to have a keen eye and better awareness to know what they are expressing. Moreover, they have already experienced too much verbal attacks. Teachers should stop attacking, evaluating, and labeling them. Students need trust and hope, and the strong guidance of school teachers to improve their innovation and enthusiasm, and enhance their self-confidence. They prefer to stay close to the teacher who is like the sun for warmth. More educators should have a deeper understanding of their impact on students and develop the good habit of praising loudly and biting their tongues in criticizing students. The following behaviors must be consciously avoided:

- (1) A group of children said: "Teacher, that teacher had breakfast in class and put the garbage on the podium..."
- (2) "The teacher said we were the worst class he had ever taught."
- (3) A child went to the infirmary because he accidentally scratched his neck, leaving a red mark. The teacher in the infirmary laughed at him: "A boy cannot withstand this kind of injury, how could you become a man in the future?" As a result, he entered a state of fight, flight or freeze as a response.

From the above incidents, it is clearly seen that teachers' verbal and non-verbal behaviors have a direct impact on students. Sometimes a naturally spoken sentence may affect a child for a lifetime, such cases are common. The occurrence of various stories and accidents constantly warns all educators that they must improve themselves and must first shape their own souls before they can truly educate students. As the famous German philosopher, Jaspers said ^[3]: "Education is a tree shaking a tree, a cloud to promote a cloud, a soul awaken another soul."

5. Courses need to be classic, future-oriented, and focus on experience

"Those who seek education are injured by learning, and those who seek education are killed by education," this is not the goal of our education.

Figure 1 shows the high school entrance examination results of four head teacher classes (a total of 120 students). The result shows that the pitfalls of students are mathematics and English. There are too many reasons behind this result, such as thinking that there is no hope in learning, not knowing how to study, not mastering the corresponding methods, not having the ability to study, etc. It also reflects that with the low performance of some subjects, they appear to be in a helpless psychological state under the trend of achievement scores only. Those subjects are still the main courses in vocational schools. Therefore, in classes that students do not understand, the learning experience is poor, and the coping strategy of a large number of students is to directly refuse learning. Thus, sleeping, playing with mobile phones in class, not doing homework (in fact, they are unable to complete it independently), and other behaviors have become common. There were a few students paying attention in the classroom, and only a handful followed the teacher's train of thought. It is actually very difficult for these rare students. To persevere in the power of such a field, they are also relatively determined or stubborn students. Teachers have no sense of accomplishment, leading to their inner professional burnout.

Instead of consuming each other, it is better to improve the school's curriculum more flexibly to make studying easier, and stimulating their inner drive and love for learning.

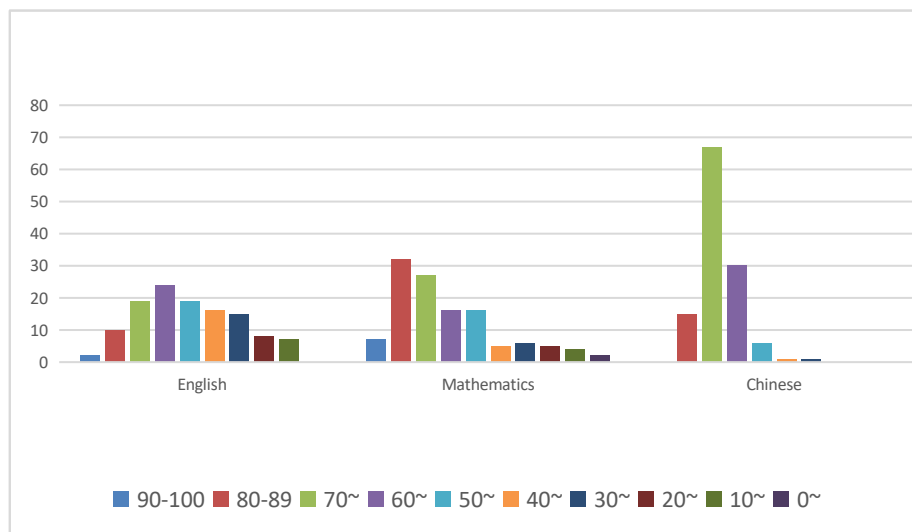


Figure 1. High school entrance examination results of four classes

The students and teachers at the school mentioned in the book *The Natural Laws of Children* are enviable. The school inherits Montessori's educational philosophy and believes that children's brains are constantly being constructed and are the scene of education at all times. The biggest reward is that students can learn something. The criteria for judging courses are whether students respond happily, whether students are truly interested, and whether learning gives them a rewarding and happy experience. Anything that does not meet the requirements will be resolutely removed or the teaching methods will be adjusted.

Vocational education is a branch of general education, which is more inclined to the needs of occupations, and it is also more personalized, which teaches students in accordance with their aptitude. This includes developing more courses that suit the characteristics of its students, such as an education supermarket, where students can choose elective courses based on their interests to meet students' various humanistic needs, and truly strive to improve students' quality in all aspects; teachers have changed traditional teaching methods, and in-depth exploration of teaching methods are suitable for the needs of students with different memory types such as auditory, visual, tactile, etc., for instance:

- (1) Foreign language and mathematics courses, in which students have a strong sense of failure, can be reduced to elective courses, or the teaching methods can be completely changed.
- (2) More arts, aesthetics, etc., such as music and painting, can be added, so that students can slowly start to love art, and from loving art to loving life, and loving life to loving the whole life.
- (3) More mental health courses, including music and art therapy, painting therapy, scene therapy, etc., can be added, so that every place in the school becomes a place for psychological externalization.
- (4) The simple physical training of exercise class can be changed, and interesting projects can be added, etc., in order to stimulate motivation. Exercise can not only keep fit but also strengthen the brain. It can also allow the body to experience excitement and happiness, and reduce depression. This is exactly what the students need.
- (5) A variety of currently popular work or entertainment software learning courses can be added, which are fun and easy to learn. They can help students to make up for the initiative they lacked in early childhood, make up for the diligence in elementary school, and regain their inner self-confidence.

- (6) The course settings can be set after consulting the students. This more carefully matches the expertise and hobbies of teachers and students, returning the teaching and learning experience to a positive and happy state. This process of relaxed and free interaction will also be a process for teachers to continuously improve themselves and accept challenges from students.

6. Vocational education requires strong support and strength, and to be outstanding

One of the author's students reads information on the Internet. Under the constant reading and stimulation of negative information, some concepts have penetrated into the heart. He has repeatedly said in class that vocational school students have nowhere to go after graduation. He doubts the use of the diploma, and believes that the society is terrible, and so on. Although, he is paranoid, no student in the class agreed with him, and his words made other students feel belittled.

At present, in the online world, a large amount of negative information is spread at the fastest speed and with the widest range. Sometimes many adults cannot resist it, let alone underage students. Fortunately, the country has made progress in rectifying the online world. Moreover, what was said at the National Education Conference is giving righteous thoughts to this society and education. Among them, it is particularly proposed to overcome the stubborn diseases of "only scores," "only for further education," "only for diplomas," "only for papers," and "only for hats," and to fundamentally solve the problem of educational evaluation baton.

In addition, the "New Vocational Education Law" was implemented in May last year, and the Party Central Committee has placed vocational education in an unprecedentedly prominent position. Secondary vocational schools are no longer low-level "part-time education," schools must truly be "providing students with different talents with a variety of talents," "the cradle of ability," "striving to give everyone the opportunity to excel in life, and become 'high-quality' technical talents" [4].

All of the above have injected strong support and strength into education, especially vocational education. These new ideas must be disseminated to students and the sense of shame among vocational school students must be completely eliminated.

7. All education promotes self-growth, and self-education achieves life

Family is the first school in life, school education is the main education, and social education is the continuation of education. There is another saying we often say: "Parents are the first teachers, school teachers are soul engineers, and society is the melting pot for growth." Thus, in society, will individuals who have received many years of education end up being "carrots, coffee, or eggs?" Why do the same educational experiences show different results? From the clues, we all know that it is not only the innate reasons of the individual, but also the result of self-education. It is also the process of the mutual game between the self, ego, and superego, and the process of exploring one's own psychological resources and accumulating energy. In the end, it all depends on the level of psychological capital accumulated as the core of "confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience."

A famous Italian educator said that the first teacher is oneself, the second is parents and school teachers, the third is the field where one is, and the fourth is nature [5]. All education promotes self-growth. When all the educational experiences received become more and more profound and focused, flow will appear. For example, "Deliberate Practice" and "The 10,000 Hours Rule" promote the spirit of craftsmanship, which requires strong psychological qualities, the most important of which are concentration and transcendence.

"Never forget the original intention, never forget the intention of doing things in the first place, and

persevere,” not forgetting the original intention can also be to treat everything as new and fresh, as if seeing it for the first time, and always stay curious. For example, if one is curious about one’s own life, one should go deep into it with the headlight of clear knowledge and mindfulness, and discover that life is a “rich mineral deposit,” and one will also discover where one’s mission lies. Positive psychology teaches this: “Choose firmly, leave extravagant time to own self who is most worthy of love, let the past painful experiences be forgotten, keep false happiness away, keep recalling the highlights of happiness, and constantly internalize the positive experience of life, constantly reward own self, always build a strong, positive, and optimistic attitude, and live every minute well, and one will gain a life of peace, confidence, satisfaction, and happiness”^[6,7].

Nowadays, society believes that in a world triggered by the Internet, everyone has already become a commodity. They focus on how to achieve their best state, become a unique product, and become a competitive product for others. This is the result of self-awareness and choice^[8].

If the above concepts can be deeply rooted in the hearts of students, they will have good awareness and positive qualities, self-education will definitely be successful, and they will definitely embark on the path of lifelong education. This is a higher level of “teaching students in accordance with their aptitude.”

8. Conclusion

The development of high-quality education is attributed to individuals to promote the three major events in life: studying, finding a job, and starting a family. Studying is about learning knowledge and skills, and the body is also maturing along with it. Job hunting is a choice that varies from person to person after studying. From a job to support the family, to a career to realize self-worth, to even a vocation to fulfill a natural mission, it runs through the process of continuous improvement in life. Family is a stage for two people, the smallest unit of society, a harbor for a better life in the future, a home for oneself, and a place full of humanity that warms each other for a lifetime.

For today’s adolescent students, self-identity must be well-developed. Rebellion, which symbolizes the power of youth on all levels, must be viewed and understood correctly. In this way, they can be allowed to live in the world of children, maintain their instinct of curiosity and exploring the world, and never forget their original aspirations; they can be continuously empowered to gradually gain the maturity and stability of adults, and can educate themselves to maintain mindfulness, smile, and choose and practice the path to truly improve the mental health and live a broader life in the future.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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