

# Rebuild Classroom Teaching Values

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**Abstract.** Educational activities cannot avoid the issue of value. The research on “new basic education” also discusses contemporary Chinese social development and educational values reform. This article proposes to rebuild classroom teaching values. This value’s core concept is: the current value of classroom teaching in China’s primary education needs to be transformed from a single transmission of ready-made knowledge presented in textbooks to a generation that can actively and healthy development in contemporary society. Its primary contents are: expand the rich educational value of subjects; reorganize the teaching content according to the realization of the educational value; comprehensively design flexible teaching content.

*Best Evidence in Chinese Education 2021; 8(2):1131-1141.*

*Doi: 10.15354/bece.21.cr02.*

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**How to Cite:** Ye, L. (2021). Rebuild classroom teaching values. *Best Evidence in Chinese Education*, 8(2):1131-1141.

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**Keywords:** Classroom Teaching, Teaching Values, New Basic Education, Active and Healthy Development

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**Conflict of Interests:** None.

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## **Question and Task**

**E**DUCATIONAL activities cannot avoid the question of value. This is a presumption of our judgment on the relationship between value and fact in education research. From a historical point of view, whenever society undergoes a significant transformation, people's criticism of education often begins with value criticism. Starting from a re-understanding of the value and purpose of education and using this as the basis and starting point, it then makes a more specific evaluation of the actual educational activities and proposes new principles, programs, and even methods. Today, we are in such an era. The research on "New Basic Education"<sup>1</sup> also discusses contemporary Chinese social development and educational values reform.<sup>2</sup>

However, when reform research enters school practice, through a lesson, what we (referring to all members participating in the "new basic education research") see is that in the field of subject teaching, most teachers' choices of educational value are still stay on "transmitting knowledge." Although some teachers have paid attention to the development of students' skills, even abilities, and intelligence, most of them are merely embellishments. As for the goals outside the scope of understanding, it is less involved. Interestingly, this kind of value is not manifested in teachers' remarks in writing articles or theoretical studies but in teaching goals and classroom behaviors in the preparation notes.

Usually, in terms of teaching objectives, the most clearly defined and understood, most of which are the "key points" and "difficult points" of the teaching of this lesson, the "skills" and "techniques" that need to be mastered. Other aspects may be mentioned simply or abstractly, or clicked with similar empty words almost every time. In more cases, it is not written at all. In the classroom, severe and responsible teachers often spend their energy on clarifying knowledge and implementing exercises so that students can have a firm grasp of knowledge and make no mistakes in exams. In short, the teaching values discussed abstractly by teachers are not consistent with the values they pursue in teaching practice, and they are far from each other.

To point out this phenomenon is not to accuse teachers of inconsistency in words and deeds, but to show that we deeply feel the change in the concept of teaching reform in the reform research. This includes the transformation of teaching values, which must not be separated from teachers' teaching practice and must pay attention to the process of how they realize internalization in their teaching practice. Only the teacher's inner concept has the fundamental role of guiding the teacher's teaching goal formulation and orientation practice behavior. Therefore, we need to work with teachers to reflect on teaching practice critically, find out the teaching values hidden and existing behind teaching behavior and speech, and then understand such values' problems. It is further necessary to discuss the basis and rationality of the new classroom teaching values with teachers, rebuild the classroom teaching values in the teachers' minds, and realize them consciously and persistently in teaching practice. The new basic education classroom teaching reform regards the connection, co-creation, and interpretation between teachers' new values and new teaching behaviors as the requirements throughout

the reform and is also one of the essential indicators for evaluating whether the reform is happening.

## **The Core Idea of the New Teaching Values**

The reconstruction of the new teaching values must start from the level of general common understanding, that is, to re-understand the value of teaching in educating people and the question of what kind of people it serves. The core concept of the common values of teaching formed by the “New Basic Education” is: The values of classroom teaching in China’s primary education need to be transformed from a single transmission of ready-made knowledge presented in textbooks to a generation that can achieve an active and healthy development in contemporary society. We believe that subject book knowledge is a resource and means of “education” in classroom teaching, serving the fundamental purpose of “education.” “Teaching” and “education” are not two things; they are different aspects of one thing. In teaching, teachers realize “education” through “teaching.” In order to teach well, teachers need to understand what kind of people to educate. Teachers who only pay attention to the value of existing knowledge transfer are actually “educating” people who passively accept, adapt, obey, and execute others’ thoughts and will as their primary way of living. The active spirit and desire to explore young students’ lives are often suppressed or even obliterated in such classroom teaching. If this situation does not change, education will become an opposing force hindering social and personal development. The “New Basic Education” advocates that today’s elementary and middle school education in China should take the formation of students’ awareness and the ability for active and healthy development as the core value, and this value must be reflected in all educational activities. Among them, “active” is a further focus and is a popular formulation of “education should be based on student development.” Here, it is necessary to explain the basis for this focus.

“Student development” is a frequently discussed issue in education. In the past ten years or so, educational theorists have first discussed whether education should be based on social development or individual development. Later, when it comes to the latter, we will further discuss the “what development” of students should be based on. Each has its own opinions, such as “harmonious development,” “subjective development,” “free development,” and “multi-faceted development,” and so on. These views give people inspiration from different angles. However, it seems that there is only an ideal state that humans are expected to achieve to explain “development.” In our view, “development” as an open and generative dynamic process is neither external nor internal. Human development can only be realized in the interaction of various human relations and activities. Therefore, we should not only set the requirements for development from the perspective of isolated individuals but should use “relationships” and “activities” as the framework to think about the “what development” of students should be the basis for education. Furthermore, as an individual, the most fundamental relationships and activities fall into two categories. One category points to the outside world (extroverted). It refers to the individual’s relationship with the surrounding world and practical activities. The other is internal (introverted), that is, the relationship between the

individual and the self, reflection, and reconstruction activities. There are only two primary ways that individuals can take in these two types of relationships and activities: active or passive. Naturally, people cannot take the initiative actively all the time, everything, and everywhere. However, from the perspective of self-development, individual initiative is a significant key factor. This initiative includes the relationship and activities of the above two dimensions. They are indispensable to the development of the individual and are closely related and interact with each other. Individual initiative is always a choice and action made after understanding the outside world, self, relationship, the value of the behavior that will occur, and generating a desire. Regardless of whether the final subject actively chooses to “forward,” actively choose to “backward,” or chooses to “unchanged,” it is all based on the individual’s knowledge and will. The initiative of individual practice is significant for everyone in an era of rapid changes in the current environment and an increase in uncertainties in the living environment. The life course of everyone living in contemporary Chinese society has more opportunities and possibilities than before the reform and opening up, but there are also more risks and crises. Therefore, people’s awareness and ability of self-selection under complex backgrounds are more important and necessary for the meaning and value of life.

The possibility of active human development can be explained using the biological subject and self-organization theory proposed by the famous contemporary French thinker Edgar Morin. Morin believes that living things can self-organize and regenerate themselves. This ability is realized by processing a series of information, by oneself and for one’s calculation. “The minimum actions of living beings are based on the premise of ‘self-calculation.’ Through this calculation, the individual processes all objects and materials according to itself in a self-centered manner. The subject is such a computing existence.”<sup>3</sup> This is to talk about the subject’s “self-organization” in the sense of living organisms. What Morin wants to explain in this way is: the subject “is not just a philosophical concept, a problem in the spiritual domain, but also an ontological concept with material substance, and it is also a scientifically provable conclusion<sup>4</sup>; the subject is not just a human characteristic. The unique characteristics are the characteristics shared by living things.” When talking about “humans,” Morin affirmed that humans are not separated from the biological realm, so they still retain the essential characteristics of living things, but humans are different from living things. He emphasized the emergence of extraordinary new forms in human beings, who are the subject of consciousness. He said: “As for us, human beings, we have consciousness, language, and culture. We are computing/known individuals: subjects, who can make decisions, make choices, make policies, enjoy freedom, and create inventions.”<sup>5</sup>

Morin’s above statement has at least two cognitive values: First, it redefines the concept of “subject” from a scientific perspective and extends it to the entire biological field, providing a new perspective for subject research. It is a perspective that stays in the field of speculation and rethinks the subject matter involved in philosophy connected with science. Second, while communicating the relationship between man and the biological world, it also highlights the human subject’s uniqueness. This unique concentration shows that people have consciousness and calculation: cognitive ability, which

makes people show a series of behavioral characteristics far beyond the biological world. The inherent power is that people can consciously and autonomously choose, plan and create.

From the perspective of education, it is more important that this kind of knowledge-calculation activity points to the environment and objects of human material existence and points to the environment and objects of human spiritual existence. It points to the external world of the individual and points to the internal world of the individual. When it points to the understanding and calculation of the inner world and directly focuses on the individual's development, the individual actively thinks and criticizes his development. When choosing goals, planning processes, and preparing for implementation, people have the individual development awareness and ability to take the initiative to control their own life and destiny. This is the essential possibility a person has. It is the most critical "self-generation and self-regeneration" ability different from any living creatures, and it is also the inner guarantee for a person as an individual to realize the value of life and obtain a happy life. Therefore, cultivating individuals' ability to develop actively has been designated by the "new basic education" as the essential primary education task to develop people's life potential.

It can be seen from this that we use the term "active" to define "development" because it not only embodies the state of activity but also contains the self-consciousness of the subject, points to relational things, and expresses the pursuit of expectations. This is our answer from the overall framework of relations and activities, based on the integration of the essential power of human beings and the needs of contemporary Chinese social development, and that education should be based on "what development of students." Also, we added the word "health" after the word "active." This is a restrictive definition, mainly to avoid misunderstandings, to avoid accusations such as "to take the initiative to do bad things, only care about personal interests, and undermine the interests of the collective and others, is it also the active development expected by education?" Here, "health" expresses a positive direction that requires individual behavior to help develop the individual's body and mind and human society. Maybe this is an unnecessary "restriction." If we regard the word "development" as inherently containing the meaning of change positively and upward, this restrictive word becomes even more superfluous.

## **Reconstruction of Subject Teaching Values**

The second level of the reconstruction of classroom teaching values is the reconstruction of subject teaching values. This is a transformation that teachers must realize whether they can implement the new teaching values at the general level after they agree with the new teaching values. Because it is related to how each teacher recognizes the specific value of the subject he teaches. Only when the understanding is clear it is possible to implement the understanding of teaching values into the planning of specific teaching behaviors from the design activities before the teaching process and provide a "blueprint" in line with the value orientation for the development of teaching practice.

Otherwise, the new teaching values at the general level will still be just verbal empty talk.

The new basic education realizes the conversion and infiltration of common teaching values recognized by teachers into subject teaching values through the research of subject teaching reform plan, case design, practice and evaluation, and research on subject teaching design.<sup>6</sup> Here, we would like to explain the main content of the reconstruction of subject teaching values with the reform requirements of teachers' teaching design and show how the general theories we put forward are transformed and permeated into the evolution process of teachers' actual work.

## ***Extend the Rich Educational Value of Subjects***

For a long time, the educational value of subjects has been limited to mastering knowledge. In practice, due to the value orientation caused by the intense pressure of "exam-oriented education," subject teaching tends to memorize or strengthen the content that may be tested in practice to achieve the explicit goal of solid memory, proficient response, and successful test. From the perspective of traditional subject syllabus and textbook presentation, the main highlight is the basic knowledge that has been formed in the subject field. It appears in front of students in the face of objective truth and requires students to understand, master and use. The main consequence of this presentation of the subject is that it has caused the subject's educational value impoverishment. First, it cuts off two connections: one is the rich and complex connection between abstract book knowledge and people's life; the other is the rich and complex connection between abstract book knowledge and people's discovery, problem-solving, and knowledge process. The knowledge encountered by students and teachers in teaching is a solidified truth, lacking knowledge of "popularity" and a bunch of "dead" symbolic conclusions. They serve as the "original materials" that make up the subject's primary content and bring about the original poverty of education resources.

Also, what is worth thinking about is that the selection of the traditional subject teaching content of elementary and middle school is based on the related scientific subject. From this point of view of the ultimate goal of subject teaching in elementary and middle school, it is also to let students master the subject's basics (including knowledge, skills, and methods) and prepare for further learning or future professional learning. Although the arrangement of teaching content and the compilation of textbooks also emphasize the need to pay attention to the students' cognitive level, characteristics, and acceptability, which cannot be entirely compiled according to the logic of the subject, but its purpose is to make it easier and better for students to learn the subject know-how. In short, the subject itself is the center of attention of subject teaching.

This creates a vital lack: the lack of attention to the needs of elementary and middle schools of different ages. On the one hand, most learning subjects' content lacks an internal connection with students' growth today. The content of classroom teaching has become a specialized field isolated from the daily life of students. It seems to belong to another world. On the other hand, the confusion, curiosity, questions, expectations, interests, and many potential abilities that students often appear in the process of

growing up are not reflected in the subject setting. After all, the subject is directly set for students to enter higher school. Students' development in learning is inevitable and indirect results of learning. The issue of "education" as the school's fundamental value, as the main body of development and growth: students' needs, from the student's need subject to the compilation of the syllabus and textbooks, have not entered the minds of the creators and compilers. As a primary, critical, prerequisite question, it is considered the basis, primary reference, and entire teaching subject's content. In curriculum reforms, people often call for the following: The society has developed, and new subjects need to be added; the science has developed, and the existing subject knowledge is outdated, and the teaching content needs to be updated. How many curriculum reforms are often completed in "additions and subtractions, additions and replacements?" However, the relationship between students' growth and development needs and the curriculum reform has not yet been studied as the core issue of curriculum reform. In our opinion, the content of curriculum and subject teaching lacks vitality, which is a deeper reason for the impoverished value of subject teaching and education.

Based on reason analysis, the "new basic education" gradually formed an action strategy to expand the value of subject education: the starting point of reform is to develop the value of existing subjects rather than creating new courses. This is a possible action strategy for the school as the basic unit and the actual school teaching reform. It is also a feasible strategy for teachers to create and realize their changes and development in research reform. However, it is necessary to further study the "color of life" in the overall reform of elementary and middle school curriculum from a long-term perspective. For now, in school practice, this task can be studied from the self-developed curriculum of some schools with relatively weak macro-control and social intervention. With the improvement of China's elementary and middle school curriculum and implementation policy openness, the school's power and ability to select and compile courses independently are enhanced. The school-based curriculum has genuinely become a universal need and action for elementary and middle schools. Furthermore, a life-rich curriculum focusing on the development and growth of young people will undoubtedly be created.

To expand the educational value of the existing subjects, the new basic education requires teachers to carefully analyze the subject's unique development value for students when designing teaching, instead of first grasping the critical points of knowledge and teaching in this lesson. We do not believe that subject knowledge is of no value to students' development and can be ignored. On the contrary, it is the primary content that must be finally mastered by students in teaching. However, the value of teaching to students should not stay here, let alone think that students exist for learning this knowledge, and teachers exist for teaching this knowledge. Teaching to serve the students' active development in many aspects is the most basic foothold. Therefore, the subject's unique educational value should be based on students' development to analyze the unique role that different subjects can play. Specifically, the development value of each subject to students, in addition to knowledge in one field, from a deeper level, at least it can also help students understand, explain, feel, understand, change their lives in

it and continue to interact with them A rich and colorful world (including nature, society, people, life, occupation, family, self, others, groups, practice, communication, reflection, learning, inquiry, creation, etc.). Moreover, form and realize their wishes, provide different paths and unique perspectives, discover methods and thinking strategies, and unique operational symbols and logic. Provide a kind of experience and experience that can only be obtained in this subject's study; enhance the unique subject's beauty discovery, appreciation, and expression ability. Only in this way can the development of students' spiritual world be nurtured in many aspects from different subjects' teaching. While developing the ability to feel, experience, understand, appreciate, change, and create the external world, they can constantly enrich and perfect their lives. Finally, experience a rich learning life and meet the growing needs of life.

## ***Reorganize Teaching Content According to the Needs of Realizing the Value of Education***

With the above understanding, the development of subject education resources also requires teachers to reorganize and process existing teaching content in two aspects during teaching design.

First, the subject's book knowledge is composed of simple to complex structure chains according to its inherent logic. The organization of teaching content is based on the structure as a large unit so that the main cognitive thread that runs through the teaching is the gradual complexity of the structure. When teaching content related to a knowledge structure, it is divided into two teaching stages. The first stage is teaching a specific structure with knowledge as the carrier, and the second stage is the stage when students use this structure to learn and expand related knowledge with a similar structure. The design of the teaching content of this organization is called the "long-term two-stage" design. Its purpose is to enable students to actively participate in learning in the teaching process and form an active learning mentality and ability. We believe that in order for students to master the initiative in learning, the most efficient way is to master and use knowledge structures. The structure has much more robust organizational and migration capabilities than knowledge points. The goal we expect to achieve is the students' firm grasp and proficient use of structure-related knowledge until internalization, but more importantly, students can discover and form structures and master and use structures flexibly. Each subject has its structure group. The learning and internalization of different subject structure groups will help students from many different inter-linked structure groups and structural thinking methods. This has a fundamental role for students to discover, understand, and solve problems with a comprehensive vision in a new, unfamiliar, and complex environment. It is essential learning required for people's survival and development in a complex and changeable era. Ability is also an essential basis for students' learning ability to be self-proliferating.

Second, re-activate the structured book knowledge with symbols as the primary carrier. The purpose is to achieve communication with three aspects: book knowledge and human life; communication with students' experience world and growth needs;



communication with people who discover and develop knowledge and history. In layman's terms, it is to restore knowledge to a new state closely related to human life and life, to present a state of life. Knowledge of the inner life state can most activate and arouse students' inner needs, interest, and confidence in learning and enhance their desire and ability to explore actively. While searching for these three connections, teachers have also expanded their field of knowledge and turned their attention from studying the teaching content to the students' pre-existing state, potential state, life experience, and development needs. This is a crucial step in the transition from "teaching" to "education" through teaching.

After the teacher has completed the above two aspects of teaching content, making an overall arrangement of the subject teaching time during the semester is possible. The "new basic education" requires breaking the "uniform movement" type of chapter-by-chapter and section-by-section distribution plan in the distribution of teaching time. Instead, it advocates dividing each structural unit's learning according to the "long-distance two-stage" design requirements. The teaching "structure" phase and the application of the "structure" phase. In the "structure" stage of teaching, the method of discovery is mainly used to allow students to start from real problems, gradually find out the structure of knowledge and the steps and methods for discovering the structure, and then form a comprehensive "class structure" of knowledge, methods, and steps through summary mode. The teaching time in this part can be moderately slowed down so that most students have a whole experience of the process of discovering and constructing a "class structure." In this way, the "class structure" is formed so that students and teachers interact gradually through the teaching process and become the student's own "class structure." On this basis, the subsequent teaching phase with "structure" can be carried out in an accelerated manner. According to the actual results of the reform experiment, on the whole, not only will the teaching progress not be slowed down due to the slowdown in the first stage, but it will also be ahead of the original schedule. We use the remaining teaching time brought by the reorganization of the structure and the improvement of students' learning ability to hold the "subject activity" and the "subject comprehensive activity" that combines the relevant subjects. These activities provide students with a more expansive, richer, vivid, and personalized possible space and stage for active development.

## ***Comprehensively Design Flexible Teaching Programs<sup>7</sup>***

In order to promote the active and healthy development of students, subject teachers under the guidance of values should complete the last synthesis in teaching design. It is to combine each lesson's specific teaching content with the teaching process's prior planning to form a "flexible teaching plan." The new basic education emphasizes the dynamic generation of lessons in the teaching process but does not advocate that teachers and students ride with loose reins in the classroom. On the contrary, it requires the design of the teaching plan, and in the design of the teaching plan, time and space are reserved for students' active participation to create conditions for the dynamic generation of the teaching process. The teaching plan is necessary to set teaching goals, but the

goals are not limited to cognition but also involve other goals that students may achieve in this class. The setting of goals should be based on teaching content and student status, and possible expectations. Goals have “flexible intervals,” which consider the differences between students and consider the possible differences between the expected goals and the actual results. The teaching process’s design focuses on the whole-process-related planning of where to start, how to advance, and how to turn. As for the end, when it abruptly stops is not absolute. The important thing is that it will happen naturally, not that the teaching schedule should be set in step with the class. The process design should also have “flexible intervals,” which can be reflected through different assignments, exercises, and activities. The process design also needs to plan a series of aspects such as teacher activities during the teaching process, related student activities, the form and method of organizing activities, the prediction of activity effects and the assumption of expected effects, the way of interaction between teachers and students, etc., and finally form a comprehensive and flexible teaching plan.

Compared with the style of a typical traditional teaching plan, it designs detailed questions, predetermined standard answers, writes down every sentence the teacher wants to say in class, and accurately calculates the time allocation of different class links. However, this new design requirement seems to be rougher, leaving too much uncertainty, flexible targets, space, and time that can be changed. However, it introduces these uncertainties and variable factors that make classroom teaching possible to be closer to each student’s actual state. It is possible to make students’ minds flying and interested, and it is possible to make teachers and students interact actively, create sparks of creation, and emerge new questions and answers.

The “new basic education” is precisely through the in-depth development, re-combination, and multi-directional activation of uniformly formulated deterministic teaching content. It is precisely by introducing modifiable factors and uncertainties into the design of the teaching process that the teaching design leaves the possibility of active participation, active interaction, and creation for the practice of teacher and student classroom teaching. In this way, the values of teaching to serve students’ initiative and healthy development can be implemented and transformed into teachers’ pre-planning of their teaching behaviors. Moreover, for this value to finally infiltrate and reflect into teaching practice, it provides “combat plan” support.

## **Notes**

1. *“Research on New Basic Education facing the 21st Century” is a comprehensive basic education reform research project hosted by the author. The research explores a series of significant issues in the transformational transformation of primary education during the transition period of Chinese society at the turn of the century to combine theory and practice. The research started in September 1994 and was carried out in two stages. The first stage is “exploratory research.” At the beginning of 1997, the project was formally approved as a critical project of the Ninth Five-Year Plan of China’s National Educational Science Plan. In 2000, the project results of exploratory re-*

search were awarded the first prize of Shanghai Municipal Educational Research Project Excellent Achievement. In September of the same year, the research entered the second phase: "Extensional and Developmental Research," which was completed in 2005. At present, this research has been listed as a critical subject of the National Philosophy and Social Science Research "Tenth Five-Year Plan."

2. Ye, L. (1994). *The spirit of the times and the construction of new educational ideals*. *Educational Research*, 1994(10):3-8. [Chinese] <https://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFD1994-JYYJ199410000.htm>
3. Edgar Moran Morin, E. & Chen, Y. (2001) *Complex thought: conscious science*. Beijing: Peking University Press. pp261. [Chinese] ISBN: 9787301049327.
4. Here, "science" is relative to "philosophy" and falls within the category of classical science. That is, science is characterized by the conclusions obtained through empirical research and can be tested.
5. Edgar Moran. *Complex thought: conscious science*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2001. 261. [Chinese]
6. "New Basic Education Research" has conducted a comprehensive subject teaching reform plan for the three subjects of elementary school Chinese, mathematics, ideology and morality, and junior middle school Chinese, mathematics, and foreign language since the exploratory stage. The ongoing "new basic education" extension and developmental research continue to deepen the research on the relevant reform plans. The ultimate goal of program research is not a template but to provide a way of thinking and methods. This paper did not discuss specific subject reform plans and cases.
7. The guiding ideology of teaching plan design is related to classroom teaching values and the classroom teaching process view. This is also an important theoretical and practical issue in studying the "new basic education" classroom teaching reform, which the author will discuss in a future article. Therefore, the discussion in this aspect of this article can only be summarized.

Received: 05 January 2021

Revised: 27 January 2021

Accepted: 15 February 2021