

The Ontological Evolution of Views of Teacher-Student

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Abstract

In the study of educational theory, debates among education models such as teacher-centered, student-centered, and learning-centered approaches have paid relatively little attention to their underlying ontological foundations. From an ontological perspective, the teacher-centered education model presupposes a subjective-objective view of teacher-student, understanding the teacher-student relationship as an objectified, materialized relationship; the student-centered education model presupposes a subject-object view of teacher-student, understanding the teacher-student relationship as an intersubjective, active relationship; the learning-centered education model presupposes a community view of teacher-student, understanding the teacher-student relationship as a co-existent relationship within the community. Systematically examining the teacher-student views presupposed by these three educational models reveals a progressive logical relationship among them. Compared with the subjective-objective view of teacher-student, the subject-object view, although enhancing the subject status of teacher-student, cannot overcome the tension between teacher guidance and student subjectivity, ultimately retaining substantial thinking. The community view of teacher-student, through relational thinking, transcends the substantial thinking of subject-object opposition, understanding the co-existence of teacher-student from the primacy of relationships in terms of the ontological significance of teachers and students becoming themselves.

Keywords

Subjective-Objective View of Teacher-Student, Subject-Object View of Teacher-Student, Community View of Teacher-Student, Teacher-Student Relationship

1. Introduction

The evolution of educational models involves an understanding of the conditions

of human existence and their interrelations. From the logic of modern education history, three models—teacher-centered, student-centered, and learning-centered—have emerged in succession, each implying an ontological understanding of the teacher-student relationship. The long-standing debate in educational philosophy over whether teacher or student ought to count as the authentic subject of education is at its root an epistemological contest over the legitimate qualifications of subjecthood. This entire dispute remains trapped within two mutually reinforcing binary frameworks: the subject-object model where one party stands as knowing subject and the other as passive object, and the symmetrical subject-subject model that merely doubles the same individualist logic. A more profound paradigmatic shift is underway, one that abandons the prior fixation on identifying which actor holds subject status within educational practice, turning its attention instead to the ways in which teachers and students co-generate meaning, presence, and relational existence together within the unfolding event of education (Woo, 2012: p. 256). In this context, this study attempts an examination of the ontological assumptions behind the three educational models, revealing the ontological foundations each model presupposes—namely, the subjective-objective view of teacher-student, the subject-object view of teacher-student, and the community view of teacher-student—and outlining the logical relationships among these three¹.

¹Inspired by Heidegger's theory of Dasein and its being-in-the-world, and Buber's ontological ideas on the I-Thou relationship, as well as their critiques of ready-made existence and the I-It relationship, this paper analyzes the teacher-centered, student-centered, and learning-centered models in the education field. It uncovers the ontological definitions of human existence behind these teacher-student relationships and traces the shift from entity-based thinking to relational thinking. In the teacher-centered model, the teacher is the authority on knowledge and students are containers of knowledge, essentially treating people as objective objects; the teacher-student relationship is between two objective entities, hence it is called a subjective-objective teacher-student view. In the student-centered model, the teacher leads and the student is the subject. While it raises the student's status as a subject, the relationship between teacher and student is still an external one between two subjects. This relationship is expressed as a continuous tension between teacher leadership and student agency, thus called a subject-object teacher-student view. In the learning-centered model, the relationship between teachers and students is considered within the reality of learning itself. The teacher-student relationship comes first, followed by the identities of teacher and student. The existence of the relationship becomes the pre-existing structure defining the essence of teacher and student, hence it is called a communal teacher-student view. The objective-subjective and subject-object views, while ontologically different, share the same entity-based thinking: they both first assume teacher and student as independent entities before entering into the educational relationship. Their difference lies only in how they define the attributes of these entities and their interaction: the subjective-objective view sees the teacher as fully active and the student as fully passive, whereas the subject-object view considers the student as active and the teacher as supportive. However, the idea that relationships are derived from pre-existing entities is never questioned. Since modern philosophy, the projection of the subject-object duality in education creates an irreconcilable tension between teacher and student. Whether in teacher-centered or student-centered models, they cannot break free from the dualistic framework, at most only shifting the opposition from coordination between two objects to two subjects. The fundamental flaw of this dualistic framework is that it first divides an original unity and then seeks to connect the two. Therefore, no matter how closely or dialectically they are connected, the split caused by the initial division cannot be resolved. In educational practice, each emphasis on teacher authority carries the risk of suppressing student agency, while emphasizing student agency risks weakening teacher guidance. To fully resolve the contradictions created by dualistic teacher-student views, we must change how we understand human existence, moving from entity-based thinking to relational thinking—defining entities through relationships rather than understanding relationships through entities.

2. Subjective-Objective View of Teacher-Student: The Ontological Basis of the Teacher-Centered Model

2.1. Overview of Teacher-Centered Education Model

The Herbartian tradition and the educational assembly line of the industrial era are the historical origins of the teacher-centered model. Herbart “emphasized the key role played by teachers in teaching activities, especially the importance of apperception. Apperception is the process of understanding and absorbing new knowledge by combining it with old knowledge.” (Luo & Ed. D, 2024: p. 347) From the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, during the industrial era, the Herbartian tradition was institutionally reinforced and amplified. Production methods represented by Fordism not only reshaped the economy but also permeated the organizational logic of education. Schools were metaphorically viewed as talent factories, education was analogized to a production line, and teachers were assigned the role of technicians or supervisors. Under this governing metaphor, educational goals were narrowed to the efficient transmission of standardized knowledge, and the evaluation of educational quality was simplified to measurable output indicators. Curriculum content was arranged in a fixed sequence, teaching time was divided into precise units, and students’ ages and grades were strictly corresponded. In this way, taking teachers as the authority of knowledge and students as containers of knowledge became the basic paradigm dominating global school education in the twentieth century.

Knowledge authority, one-way indoctrination, and disciplinary regulation are the classroom structures of the teacher-centered model. The establishment of teachers’ knowledge authority is the cognitive foundation of the teacher-centered model. In this model, teachers’ knowledge authority originates from the epistemological assumption that knowledge is certain, objective, and a completed achievement of human understanding, with teachers serving as the legitimate transmitters of this achievement. One-way communication constitutes the interactive characteristic of the teacher-centered model. Verbal interactions in classroom teaching are structured as teacher-dominated with student responses. The teacher is the initiator and controller of classroom discourse, and lecturing occupies the absolute majority of classroom time; students’ verbal behavior mainly involves responding to the teacher, and these responses are expected to reproduce the pre-set answers of the teacher. Disciplinary regulation constitutes the guarantee of order in the teacher-centered model. Herbart regarded management as the primary step in education, which in practice is reflected in the continuous attention to and fine-tuned control of classroom order. Students’ body posture, gaze direction, timing of speaking, and even seating arrangements are all included within the teacher’s management authority. The means of regulation include both explicit instructions and punishments as well as implicit evaluation and comparison. This disciplinary practice, while maintaining teaching order, subtly establishes obedience as the foremost virtue for students.

Essentialist educational philosophy and the principle of efficiency first are the

theoretical foundations of the teacher-centered model. Essentialists, represented by William Bagley, sharply criticized the child-centered ideas advocated by progressive education. Essentialism “positions education as a process of transmitting basic knowledge, core values, and cultural heritage deemed essential to the life of society” (Fajri & Adibah, 2026: p. 241). Within this theoretical perspective, teachers are the guardians and transmitters of cultural essence, the organizers and interpreters of curriculum logic, and the guides and evaluators of the learning process. Essentialism’s emphasis on systematic disciplinary knowledge further reinforces the teacher’s authority as a knowledge expert. Essentialism upholds the necessity of subject-specific curricula and systematic instruction, believing that disciplinary knowledge has an inherent logical structure and cumulative sequence, which can only be effectively mastered by students through the careful organization and explanation by teachers. The principle of efficiency first defends the teacher-centered model from another dimension, viewing education as a social activity of resource input and output return, establishing efficiency as the core standard for evaluating education. Within the framework of classroom teaching, a teacher facing dozens or even hundreds of students demonstrates the clear advantage of the teacher-centered model in maximizing educational effectiveness within limited time and space. By having the teacher uniformly instruct, assign tasks, and assess, the largest number of students can be reached at minimal organizational cost, and this efficiency-first argument has a lasting influence on educational decision-making.

2.2. Ontological Assumptions of Teachers and Students as Objective Subjects

The ontological presupposition of the teacher-centered model is that both teachers and students are, in a sense, objective objects. The so-called objective objects do not generally refer to material entities, but to specific modes of existence. Teachers and students are pre-positioned in an already completed, statically determined order of existence, and their essence and function are stipulated before the educational activities begin. This mode of existence, using Heidegger’s terminology, is *Vorhandensein*. Below, this ontological presupposition is analyzed from three dimensions: the logic of reification, the subjective-objective opposition, and the rigidification of time and space.

Under the reification logic of the subjective-objective view of teacher-student, teachers are authorities on knowledge while students are containers of knowledge. Within the ontological framework of the subjective-objective view of teacher-student, the existence of both teachers and students is prescribed by the logic of reification. Reification refers to that human “qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality, they are things which he can ‘own’ or ‘dispose of’ like the various objects of the external world”, and “a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.” (Lukács, 1971: p. 83,

100). The value of a student's existence lies in the capacity of the container, namely the efficiency in receiving, storing, and reproducing knowledge. As containers, students undergo no essential change in the educational process; what changes is merely the amount of content. Students are understood as static, ready-made entities that can be measured by external standards. For teachers, their existence is pre-set as the authorities ensuring knowledge. Teachers are the sole legitimate distributors of knowledge and the starting point of information flow. From an ontological perspective, teachers are also objects of reification. As knowledge authorities, the existence of teachers is limited to a functional existence, with their value lying in the efficient and accurate output of knowledge.

Teachers are absolute observers and shapers of students, reflecting the opposition in the way of existence of teachers and students in the subjective-objective view of teacher-student. Within the ontological framework of the subjective-objective view of teacher-student, the teacher-student relationship is the relationship between two objective entities, with the teacher having absolute authority to observe and shape, while the student is in a completely passive position. As an observer, the teacher occupies the active role in the cognitive activity, and the student, as the observed, is the object of knowledge, whose existence significance is to be determined by the observer. As a shaper, the teacher has the power and responsibility to mold students according to preset standards, with students regarded as raw material to be shaped. It should be noted that within this framework, teachers are also constrained by their mode of existence; they are required to play the role of omniscient and omnipotent observers and shapers, and this role exists in a continual and profound tension with their true nature as finite, fallible, and needy human beings.

The linear accumulation of knowledge and the spatial fixation of education are the temporal and spatial expressions of the subjective-objective view of teacher-student. Within the framework of the subjective-objective view of teacher-student, time and space are static and homogeneous physical dimensions. In terms of time, cognition adheres to a developmental view of linear accumulation, and learning is understood as a process in which knowledge is added sequentially along the timeline. This concept of time solidifies in educational practice as a series of institutional arrangements, collectively forming a precise system of temporal discipline. In terms of space, education exhibits characteristics of fixed fields. The spatial layout of classrooms is not a coincidental arrangement but a materialized expression of the subjective-objective view of teacher-student in physical space. The podium separates teachers and students in space, giving teachers a visual and discursive advantage from a high position; the row-based seating isolates students from each other, suppressing the potential for horizontal communication; the uniform facing of the podium confirms that the direction of knowledge is singular—that is, flowing from teachers to students. The dual rigidity of time and space together produces the objective objectification of the existence of teachers and students.

2.3. The Ontological Dilemma of Subjective-Objective View of Teacher-Student

While the subjective-objective view of teacher-student grants education certainty, order, and efficiency, it obscures the authentic existence of teachers and students as human beings, distorts the ethical nature of the educational relationship, and narrows the dimensionality of the meaning of knowledge.

The subjective-objective view of teacher-student obscures the subjectivity of students as human beings. The so-called student subjectivity is not an operationalized concept such as initiative in learning or classroom participation in education, but the *Seinkönnen* of Dasein revealed by Heidegger. “An ability-to-be is the capacity to inhabit a particular range of possibilities. It involves possessing the understanding, skills, and affective inclination to pursue these possibilities. Ability-to-be defines Dasein’s own relation to its being. Each Dasein has its own ability to be. It cannot be separated from Heidegger’s explanation of Dasein’s being as existence, and in particular the latter’s characterization as possibility.” (Wraithall, 2021: Summary). As containers of knowledge, students’ *Seinkönnen* is suspended; education is not a process for students to become, but a program in which they are shaped. This suppression of the ability to be manifests on three levels. First, the student’s future is closed off. The future here is not an open horizon awaiting student decisions, but a pre-determined standard of learning outcomes. Second, the student’s past is denied. As unique individuals, students carry their life histories, accumulated experiences, and pre-understandings. These should serve as a horizon for understanding new knowledge, yet they are not seen as resources but as obstacles. Third, the student’s present is deprived. In the linear process toward predetermined goals, the value of the present lies in its instrumental contribution to subsequent goals.

The subjective-objective view of teacher-student alienates the relationship of teachers and students. Using Martin Buber’s concept of relational ontology for distinction, the subjective-objective view of teacher-student corresponds to the Ich-Es relationship. The Ich-Es relationship is an objective relationship, where I regard the other as an object to be experienced, utilized, and analyzed. In this relationship, I encounter the other in partial existence, extracting certain attributes to meet my needs, while both parties’ wholeness and uniqueness are suspended. When students are pre-assumed to be knowledge containers to be filled, teachers are not facing complete, unique, irreducible individuals, but cognitive objects with specific functions. Similarly, when teachers are pre-assumed to be authorities of knowledge, students are also not facing complete individuals, but institutional identities with the function of supplying knowledge. The teacher-student relationship in the subjective-objective view is a mutually alienating relationship, in which teachers and students regard each other as functional “Es” rather than personal “Du”; both participate in education as partial existences rather than whole beings, and both are objectified in the relationship, preventing authentic encounters. As long as teachers and students are ontologically pre-assumed to be objective ob-

jects, the Ich-Es relationship becomes the only possible form of relationship.

The subjective and objective view of teacher-student distorts the nature of knowledge. Within this framework, knowledge is understood as an objective, definite, and completed human cognitive achievement, while education is a one-way process of transmitting this result from teacher to student, which fundamentally obscures the generative nature of knowledge as an activity of human understanding. Philosophical reflections on the nature of knowledge show that knowledge has dual properties that are irreducible. On the one hand, knowledge does have an objective dimension. In the long-term practice of human cognition, human beings have formed a relatively stable conceptual system, method norms and theoretical achievements, which constitute the definite content of knowledge inheritance in a specific era. On the other hand, knowledge also has a generative dimension. The acquisition of any knowledge is not a passive reception of external information, but a meaning construction by the cognitive subject based on his own pre-understanding and interaction with objects. From the ontological perspective, the subjective and objective view of teacher-student is fundamentally confused here, which equates human understanding of the world at a specific stage with the world itself. Students are asked to learn not how we currently understand the world, but what the world is. This confusion causes knowledge to lose its historicity and openness as an activity of human understanding, and is regarded as an unquestioned objective truth that transcends time and space. The subjective and objective view of teacher-student makes the school a place for knowledge consumption rather than creation by solidifying knowledge into objective truth.

The ontological flaws of the teacher-centered model cannot be overcome through methodological improvements, but must resort to ontological transformation.

3. Subject-Object View of Teacher-Student: Ontological Shift of the Student-Centered Model

3.1. Overview of Student-Centered Education Model

The rise of student-centered education model is reflected in the shift of educational focus from knowledge to the learners, and from the organization of the educational process to the development of the learners.

John Dewey's experiential naturalism and Jean Piaget's genetic epistemology are the theoretical foundations of the student-centered model. The former reconstructs the understanding of the relationship between experience and education, while the latter provides scientific justification for the construction of cognitive development by the subject. Dewey believed that traditional experience presupposes a dualistic thinking framework, understanding experience as passive reception of sensations rather than as the active interaction between the organism and the environment. "The nature of experience can be understood only by noting that it includes an active and a passive element peculiarly combined. On the active

hand, experience is trying—a meaning which is made explicit in the connected term experiment. On the passive, it is undergoing.” (Dewey, 2001: p. 145). Individuals act upon the environment, and the feedback from the environment changes the individual, thereby giving experience an increase in meaning. Dewey understood education as growth, that is, education is not a utilitarian process for preparing for future life, but life itself. In this theoretical perspective, teachers are no longer authorities of knowledge, but participants in educational activities. Piaget provided theoretical explanations for the construction of cognitive development by the subject from a scientific standpoint. Piaget pointed out that “knowing an object does not mean copying it—it means acting upon it. It means constructing systems of transformations that can be carried out on or with this object.” (Piaget, 1971: p. 15). In Piaget’s theoretical system, schema is the mental structure used by the subject to organize experience; assimilation is the process of incorporating new experiences into existing schemas; accommodation is the process in which the subject actively adjusts schemas to adapt to the environment when existing schemas cannot assimilate new experiences; equilibration is the tendency of dynamic coordination between assimilation and accommodation. Cognitive development occurs in the alternating movement of assimilation and accommodation, achieving the structural evolution of schemas from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract through the continuous process of equilibration. It is clear that educational activities are not about pouring knowledge into a container, but about promoting the continuous generation of cognitive schemas.

Discovery learning, inquiry-based teaching, and the curricular reform of making learning relevant to life are practice forms of student-centered models. Discovery learning emphasizes that students are not limited to accepting simplified conclusions; rather, they can personally discover the structures and principles of a subject in ways that match their cognitive level. The goal of discovery learning is not for students to uncover unknown new knowledge, but for them to gain an understanding of the knowledge structure and confidence in their own cognition through personal inquiry. Parallel to discovery learning, inquiry-based teaching has achieved systematic development and promotion in the field of science education. Inquiry-based teaching views science not only as a body of knowledge but also as a method and attitude for exploring the world. Under this guiding concept, the goal of science education is not merely for students to memorize scientific conclusions, but for them to experience the process of scientific inquiry. Discovery learning and inquiry-based teaching together reflect respect for learners’ experiences; students’ existing experiences are not seen as interfering factors to be eliminated, but as valuable resources in educational activities. This concept has prompted a life-relevant reform in curriculum design, embedding subject knowledge into real-world problem contexts that students can understand, so that abstract concepts gain experiential meaning. Individual differences are no longer obstacles to be removed, but educational realities that need to be addressed.

The shift from “what to teach” to “who is learning” represents a discourse

change toward a student-centered model. Discourse is not only a symbolic tool describing reality but also a practical force that constructs reality. When the basic vocabulary of talking about education changes, educational practices change accordingly. First, the discourse of teaching objectives shifts from content to outcomes. In the teacher-centered model, the discourse of teaching objectives revolves around “what to teach,” and the core of teaching assessment is “what was taught” rather than “what was learned.” In the student-centered model, teaching objective discourse no longer takes teacher actions as the subject but rather student actions. Bloom’s Taxonomy of educational objectives is a landmark event of this shift, moving the educational focus from “what the teacher taught” to “what the student can do.” Second, the discourse of the teaching process shifts from lecturing to activities. In the teacher-centered model, the main narrative of the teaching process is teacher action, while students are largely invisible. In the student-centered model, the core of instructional design is what students do, and teacher actions support and guide student learning activities. Finally, the discourse of educational evaluation shifts from scores to evidence. In the teacher-centered model, the function of evaluation is to differentiate and select, with scores serving as a measure of student ability. In the student-centered model, evaluation is “assessment for learning” rather than “assessment of learning,” with concepts such as formative assessment and performance assessment becoming central in educational discourse. In this discourse, evaluation is not about labeling but about providing real-time information on learning.

3.2. Ontological Assumptions of Teachers and Students as the Subjects of Activities

Unlike the teacher-centered model, which presupposes that the existence of teachers and students is static and can be observed and measured as objective entities, the student-centered model no longer views the existence of teachers and students as fixed entities, but as subjects generated in activity. This ontological presupposition is analyzed from three dimensions: the activity-based determination of teachers’ and students’ existence, the dialectical unity of subject and object, and the manifestation of intersubjectivity.

Learning by doing and interactive generation are the active conditions of existence for teachers and students. In a student-centered model, teachers and students do not enter education with pre-completed conditions of existence; their conditions of existence are constructed and reshaped within education. Dewey’s proposition of learning by doing carries ontological implications, as it involves a redefinition of the learner’s existence. Doing is not an auxiliary means of learning, but a mode of existence for the learner. Learners do not first exist and then do; rather, they truly exist in the process of doing. This principle also applies to teachers; teachers do not enter the classroom already fully existing as educators, but are generated and confirmed through interaction with students. Educators are not static identity labels, but dynamic modes of existence. Teachers continuously con-

struct their existence as educators through teaching activities such as observing students, responding to students, adjusting instruction, and reflecting on the outcomes. The active conditions of existence for teachers and students require educational evaluation to shift from outcome measurement to process understanding, and from static labeling to dynamic generation.

The relationship between teacher leadership and student subjectivity is a dialectical unity of subject and object. The student-centered model does not elevate students to an absolute subject nor belittle teachers to a marginal object; rather, it seeks a dialectical unity between subject and object, where the teacher is leading and the student is the subject. Student subjectivity means that learning is ultimately the student's own activity, and the teacher cannot act in their place. Teacher leadership means that students' learning is not blindly spontaneous, but the teacher, with more mature experience and knowledge, provides direction and guidance. However, placing teacher leadership and student subjectivity side by side presents tension at the ontological level. Practically, this tension manifests as two opposing tendencies. One is the suppression of student subjectivity by teacher leadership, where the teacher nominally acknowledges the student's status as a subject but in practice substitutes their own will for the student's choice. The other is the dissolution of teacher leadership by student subjectivity, where the teacher, out of respect for the student's subjectivity, abandons guidance and norms, and education becomes an activity lacking direction. Furthermore, the subject-object view of teacher-student understands their relational existence as the interaction of a subject with a quasi-subject rather than as a primordial coexistence. Consequently, the tension between teacher leadership and student subjectivity appears as two external forces that need to be coordinated, rather than different aspects of the same coexistent relationship.

The regulation of mutual recognition between teachers and students manifests intersubjectivity. The student-centered model breaks the unidirectional cognition between teachers and students. When education becomes an activity jointly participated in by teachers and students, both teachers and students are knowers and known in this activity. Teachers not only understand students but are also understood by students; teachers acknowledge their own limitations and their role as learners. When students realize that teachers are also learners, what teachers convey is not just the content of knowledge, but also the attitude towards knowledge. In a student-centered classroom, students are encouraged to examine issues from different perspectives, which not only enriches their understanding of the issues but also cultivates the virtue of intersubjectivity. This virtue enables students to transcend self-centered limitations, realizing that their understanding is just one among many, and that others' understandings are not errors to be corrected but another possibility worthy of listening to and engaging in dialogue with. However, the mutual recognition and perspective exchange between teachers and students is mainly understood as a means for individual cognitive development, rather than a fundamental mode of co-existence between teachers and students. The teacher-

student relationship still exists as a relation external to the individual, rather than as the internal structure of the individual in co-existence.

3.3. The Ontological Limits of the Subject-Object View of Teacher-Student

The subject-object view of teacher-student, on the ontological level, recognizes the student's status as an active subject, liberating the teacher-student relationship from a rigid subject-object confrontation and understanding it within dynamic activity and interaction. However, from a critical perspective, the subject-object view of teacher-student still fails to break through the framework of the subject-object binary opposition.

Compared to the objective-subjective view of teacher-student, which sees the teacher-student relationship as a functional connection between things, the subject-object view of teacher-student opens up space for the subjective initiative of teachers and students. By establishing activity as the core category for understanding the existence of teachers and students, it reveals that the identity of teachers and students is not a predetermined attribute that exists prior to educational activity, but a dynamic process continuously generated within educational activities. Students are not containers waiting to be filled with knowledge, but actors constructing meaning through interaction with their environment; teachers are not knowledge carriers, but reflective participants engaged in ongoing understanding with students. The subjective initiative of students are not merely means to improve learning efficiency, but a mode of human existence itself. The subject-object view of teacher-student, through mutual recognition between both parties, injects a human dimension into the teacher-student relationship. When students are recognized as having agency, teachers no longer see them as objective objects to be processed, but must respect their subject status. When teachers are allowed to show their shortcomings in front of students, students also gain the possibility of understanding teachers as concrete individuals.

However, the subject-object view of teacher-student still cannot escape the binary framework of subject versus object. Under the subject-object binary framework, the subject is the ultimate basis of cognition and action; it assigns meaning to objects without depending on them and determines the other without being determined. This meaning-giving subject has an external relationship with the world and a derived relationship with other subjects. Students are regarded as autonomous constructors of meaning, which certainly elevates the status of students as subjects, but it creates a new ontological difficulty: how education can legitimately intervene in student development. The so-called unified expression of teacher guidance and student subjectivity does not solve this difficulty, because both teachers and students are self-determining subjects, and the relationship between them can only be the external coordination of two determining forces. Although the subject-object view of teacher-student acknowledges that the teacher-student relationship is an interaction between two subjects, it does not challenge

the binary division between subject and object itself. In the subject-object view of teacher-student, the teacher-student relationship is derived; it depends on pre-existing entities. In other words, the subject-object view of teacher-student does not understand entities from the perspective of relationships but understands relationships from the perspective of entities. In this sense, the subject-object view of teacher-student still lies within the paradigm of substantial thinking; it expands substances from one to two and extends relationships from one-way to two-way.

For this reason, the subject-object view of teacher-student reveals two drawbacks in practice: one is the extreme focus on the student, and the other is the dissolution of the teacher's functions and identity anxiety. When students are regarded as the only legitimate basis for the content and process of education, any guidance from teachers is suspected of infringing on the students' subjectivity. The task of education is thus simplified to conforming to the students' immediate interests and meeting their current needs, while the responsibility to guide students beyond their existing experiences and into a broader world is suspended. In Dewey's words, education should start from the students' existing experiences, but education cannot be entirely determined by the students' immediate interests. Alongside the drawbacks on the student side, there are drawbacks on the teacher side: function dissolution and identity anxiety. Viewing teachers as facilitators of learning, providers of resources, and creators of environments implicitly carries the risk of their functions being dissolved. In practice, this risk has two consequences: first, the professional judgment of teachers is suspended, and teachers become neutral supporters; second, teachers' identity recognition falls into crisis, making it difficult for them to affirm their value in their work. These issues cannot be attributed to misunderstanding of concepts or poor implementation, but to the ontological limitations of the subject-object view of teacher-student. When teachers and students are viewed as two independent subjects, emphasizing the subjectivity of one side necessarily implies a limitation on the other. Teacher leadership and student subjectivity can only exist in a zero-sum game.

4. Community View of Teacher-Student: The Ontological Sublimation of the Learning-Centered Model

4.1. New Exploration of Learning-Centered Education Model

After the emergence of the learning-centered educational concept, it is sometimes equated with focusing on learning outcomes, sometimes understood as emphasizing the learning process, and sometimes used as a tautology for the student-centered model. In addressing these issues, it is necessary to clarify the true connotation of the learning-centered educational model from three dimensions: conceptual analysis, practical scenario, and theoretical correspondence.

Understanding the learning-centered model hinges on grasping the direction and method of its questioning. The "problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and stu-

dents to become Subjects of the educational process by overcoming centralized governance and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality.” (Freire, 1970: p. 59). The core of education is no longer about which side dominates, but about the event of learning itself. When learning, rather than teacher and student, is the focus, the mode of existence of both teacher and student is recontextualized. Teacher and student identities are no longer presumed to be attributes independent of learning, but are defined during the learning process. In this sense, it is not that teachers and students exist prior to learning, but that learning constitutes the ontological basis of their identities. In the learning-centered model, learning is granted a special ontological status, meaning that learning is not a mechanical process subject to arbitrary manipulation, but Ereignis with its own logic. Ereignis differs from a creation: the result of creation exists in the creator’s intention beforehand; the result of Ereignis cannot be reduced to any participant’s prior intention. When learning is understood as Ereignis, teachers, with their rich experience and mature judgment, provide guidance for the occurrence and deepening of learning events; students, with their fresh perspectives and genuine confusion, inject vitality and possibility into the learning event.

In the field of practice, the construction of learning communities and the drive of authentic tasks are typical forms of the learner-centered model. In a learning community, learning cannot be reduced to isolated individual cognition; it consists instead in the mutual, collective development of all participants as they engage together in sustained shared practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991: p. 33). Learning communities have the following typical characteristics: first, community members are united based on shared knowledge domains; second, the relationships between community members are differentiated roles and reciprocal; third, community members develop shared discourse and norms. Related to building learning communities, authentic task-driven learning embeds learning tasks into real problem situations, allowing students to naturally acquire knowledge, skills, and thinking while addressing tasks. Authenticity does not mean that tasks are exactly equivalent to real-world practice, but that tasks retain the characteristics of knowledge application in real practice. Authentic tasks typically have the following characteristics: first, there is no single, predetermined correct answer; second, they require the integrated use of multiple areas of knowledge and skills; third, they evoke students’ intrinsic motivation to engage.

The learning-centered model resonates with the theoretical breakthroughs in the fields of learning sciences, cognitive sciences, and the sociology of knowledge since the latter half of the twentieth century. Among them, situated learning theory and distributed cognition theory are representative. Situated learning theory, proposed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, advocates that “learning takes place through interaction. All members are encouraged to speak at discussions and to maintain friendship with other A. A. members”, and “learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership.” (Lave

& Wenger, 1991: p. 53, 83). Specifically, learning is not about the acquisition and storage of information but about the transformation of participation and the formation of identity; knowledge is not a self-contained abstract system but a living tool situated in specific practice contexts; the teacher-student relationship is not that of knowledge transmitter and receiver but of members at different stages of development within the same practice community. Distributed cognition theory “reveals how systems that are larger than an individual may have cognitive properties in their own right that cannot be reduced to the cognitive properties of individual persons” (Hutchins, 1995: p. 266). In terms of educational activities, students’ performance depends on the cognitive environment they are in. The task of education is to cultivate students’ ability to effectively utilize distributed cognitive resources; secondly, collaboration is not only necessary for developing social skills but also for addressing complex cognitive tasks; lastly, technology is not merely a medium for presenting information but a participant in cognitive labor.

4.2. Ontological Assumptions of Teachers and Students as Co-Being Members

The essence of the ontological transformation of the learning-centered model is to return teachers and students from being independent, pre-existing entities to becoming members of a community with each other in a state of co-existence. The following elaborates on this from three aspects: the revolutionary existence of teachers and students, the interpretation of teacher-student co-existence, and the dual attributes of teacher-student.

The community view of teacher-student fundamentally changes the understanding of the existence of teachers and students, that is, from substantial thinking to relational thinking. Substantial thinking is the kind of thinking that first understands existents as independent entities and then inquires into the relationships between entities. Relational thinking, on the contrary, holds that relationships are not derivations of entities, but conditions that make entities’ own existence possible. Heidegger’s analysis of ready-to-hand existence and being-in-the-world reveals the primordial unity of Dasein with the world. Dasein is In-der-Welt-sein, and the world is the basis for Dasein’s existence. Therefore, Dasein and others do not exist separately and then encounter each other; Dasein itself is Mitsein, meaning others are integral components of Dasein. From the perspective of relational thinking, teachers and students are not pre-given facts prior to the educational relationship, but dynamic processes generated within the educational relationship. A teacher is not a label granted by the institution, but an achievement earned within the relationship. Similarly, a student’s being a student is constituted by their relationships with teachers and peers. The teacher-student relationship is not a third entity between teacher and student, but is precisely the mode of their co-existence.

Corresponding to relational thinking, the concept of Mitsein serves as an analytical tool for the primordial structure of the teacher-student relationship. As is well known, Mitsein is Heidegger’s concept revealing Dasein’s relationship with

others. In addition, Martin Buber's I-Thou relational thought provides a supplement for understanding Mitsein. Heidegger points out that Dasein primarily encounters the world not as an isolated self, but as a being engaged with others in the world; that is, Dasein is with others from the very beginning. Heidegger further distinguishes two ways of relating to others: one is einspringen, and the other is vorausspringen. The community view of teacher-student advocates vorausspringen in the teacher-student relationship. Buber's insight is that unlike objectified relationships such as I-It, the I-Thou relationship "is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things", "I-Thou can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, I say Thou. All real living is meeting." (Buber, 1970: p. 8, 11). Buber describes the I-Thou relationship in education as Umfassung. Umfassung is not empathy; it is that I truly experience your experience while maintaining myself. Educational Mitsein has the following characteristics: first, it is being-with in difference; second, it is reciprocity in asymmetry; third, it is joint cohesion oriented toward a learning event. In short, teachers and students do not find the meaning of Mitsein in each other, but achieve Mitsein when they jointly engage in learning events.

Based on the explanation of co-existence of teachers and students, the community view of teacher-student provides a completely new understanding of the attributes of teachers and students. In the community view of teacher-student, teachers and students are different aspects of members of the same relational community. Teachers are not knowledge transmitters or facilitators of learning, but advanced learners; students are not knowledge receivers or constructors of meaning, but novice researchers. Viewing teachers as advanced learners and students as novice researchers means that teachers are not beings different from students, but different aspects of the same being. Teachers may be further along the path of learning than students, but they too face the boundaries of knowledge and the confusion of understanding. Teachers are able to guide students because they have experienced the difficulties that students are currently experiencing and have richer experiences in the path of learning. Corresponding to the teacher's attributes, students as novice researchers also demonstrate the presence of the same learner identity. Qualifying students' learning as research implies that there is no insurmountable gap between teachers and students. The relationship between teachers and students is a companionship at different stages within the same community. Teachers provide demonstrations to students through their own experiences, and students observe teachers to form independent research. The teacher-student relationship in relational existence is the dual attributes of teacher and student among members of the teacher-student community.

4.3. The Ontological Transcendence of the Community View of Teacher-Student

The community view of teacher-student fundamentally transforms the perspec-

tive on understanding the teacher-student relationship, allowing those hidden and to-be-restored educational origins to reappear. The teacher-student relationship returns to the original meaning of mutual growth through teaching, knowledge production shifts from individual possession to collaborative construction, and education moves from a mode of human possession to generative co-existence.

The community view of teacher-student, with its ontological presupposition of co-existence, provides existential validation for mutual growth in teaching. From the viewpoint of co-existence in the community view of teacher-student, mutual growth in teaching is not an external interaction between two independent individuals but an internal determination of the co-existing relationship itself. When teachers and students meet within a learning community and come together toward a learning event, teachers and students do not first grow separately and then share their results; rather, they accomplish each other's growth within the co-existing relationship. Teaching and learning are not two activities that can be clearly separated; teachers teach while learning, and students learn while teaching—the existence of both interweaves and permeates in co-existence. Affirming mutual growth in teaching at the ontological level means that it is a genuine hallmark of education. When mutual growth occurs in an educational relationship, the relationship is authentic; when there is a lack of reciprocal development, the educational relationship is alienated. This suggests that the standard for evaluating education should include not only the growth of students but also the growth of teachers.

The community view of teacher-student views knowledge production as a collaborative creation of the community, fundamentally transforming the way knowledge is produced. Knowledge production is a fundamental activity that makes humans human, and it exists in every member of the community rather than a few authorities. Therefore, schools are not only sites for knowledge dissemination but also for knowledge production. Collaboration among students, and between teachers and students, is the creation of collective intelligence through joint construction. When members of a community engage in genuine dialogue around a complex problem, they achieve understandings that no individual could reach alone. This understanding is not a simple aggregation of different members' viewpoints, but a new quality that emerges in dialogue, with the community as a whole generating insights that individuals cannot foresee. The transformation of the knowledge production method does not eliminate teacher authority; it stems from the wisdom the teacher demonstrates within the learning community, and students also form differentiated authority through their contributions.

Overcoming educational alienation is the most profound transcendence of the community view of teacher-student. Educational alienation refers to the transformation of education into a force that suppresses human generation as the purpose. Erich Fromm examined the alienation that pervaded modern industrial civilization, and found the fundamental split in human existence: “the one, to have—to possess—that owes its strength in the last analysis to the biological factor of the

desire for survival; the other, to be—to share, to give, to sacrifice—that owes its strength to the specific conditions of human existence and the inherent need to overcome one's isolation by oneness with others.” (Fromm, 1976: p. 93). Fromm pointed out that the way of human existence in modern society has become the having mode. The knowledge, wealth, status, etc. that someone has defines what they are, and all their activities point to having more. In contrast, the being mode of existence refers to the way in which people truly become themselves through their own activities. Someone does not define himself by having, but realizes himself through life activities. Introducing this framework into education, the having mode of existence means that knowledge is materialized as an object of having, and education is understood as the process of having knowledge. The subjective-objective view of teacher-student is a typical form of the having mode of existence, and although the subject-object view of teacher-student tries to overcome this alienation, it has not been able to get rid of the logic of having. Elevating students to constructors is still having, that is, having of the ability to construct knowledge; Teachers and students cooperate in education, but the purpose of cooperation is still to have more knowledge. The community view of teacher-student opens up the being mode of existence that transcends the existence of external relations between subjects. In the being mode of existence, the purpose of education is to be people in the coexistence relationship. The education of being mode of existence has three meanings: first, the focus of education shifts from what to have to who to be; Secondly, individual being and community being in education are the same process; Finally, the time for education has shifted from pointing to the future to blooming in the present.

It should be pointed out that the ontological transcendence of the community view of teacher-student does not mean that structural constraints such as class size, standardized exams, and social selection automatically disappear; rather, it provides a new perspective for understanding education. Although the community view of teacher-student faces rigid constraints from the education system and the cultural challenge of performance-oriented thinking, it provides a clear direction for a genuine understanding of the relationships of teacher-student. Education is not just about cultivating knowledge, skills, and qualities, but also about the mutual achievement of complete personalities.

5. Conclusion

From the ontological implications of the existence of teachers and students, the three educational models—teacher-centered, student-centered, and learning-centered—presuppose three views of teacher-student, namely, the subjective-objective view, the subject-object view, and the community view, and there exists a logical succession among them. Specifically, the ontological succession of the view of teacher-student shows a progressive logic from object to subject to co-being. The community view of teacher-student understands co-existence through relational thinking, achieving an ontological transcendence of the subject-object dichotomy.

The objective-subjective view of teacher-student understands teachers and students as objective entities ontologically. The teacher-student relationships constructed on this ontological assumption are essentially reified relationships, where human existence is reduced to the attributes of things, human activity simplified to the functions of things, and human relationships emptied into the transmission of things. The subject-object view of teacher-student ontologically emphasizes the subject status of both teachers and students, elevating their relationship from one of objectivity to one of subjectivity. However, the subjectivity of the teacher-student relationship based on educational activities still does not escape the framework of the subject-object duality, first conceiving teachers and students as independent entities and only then forming relationships through activities, thereby creating a tension of alternation between teacher dominance and student subjectivity. The community view of teacher-student shifts from substantive thinking to relational thinking based on the co-existence of teachers and students; the pre-existence of teacher-student relationships in education makes the existence of both teachers and students possible. The ontological transcendence of the community view of teacher-student is reflected in three aspects: first, the relational nature of existence; second, the constitutive nature of difference; and third, the authenticity of being. The community view sets aside the question of who is the subject and instead asks the more fundamental question of how teachers and students co-exist in educational activities, thereby moving beyond the dualistic framework and opening a new horizon. In this new horizon, the distinction between teacher and student is not a qualitative difference of object or subject, but different aspects of the same relationship within community life.

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