

# Exploring the ‘Why’ and ‘How’ of Learning from Children in Teacher-Child Interactions

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## Abstract

Learning from children is not only a concept, but also a path for teachers and children to grow together. This article starts from the author’s practice and realizes that as a concept, it reflects the correct views on children and teachers. With case studies as support, it demonstrates the “why” of learning from children in five aspects and the “how” of operability in three aspects in practice, in order to clarify the correctness of the concept of learning from children, explore the feasibility of learning from children, and ultimately promote the common growth of teachers and children.

**Keywords:** learning from children, teacher child interaction

## 1. The Concept of Learning from Children: Reflecting the Views of Children and Teachers

Children, due to their own characteristics, are always in a passive structure where they coexist with adults. The correct view of children tells us to have less confidence in education and more reflection on the adult world. In this way, teachers’ courage to learn from children will increase, and the children in our consciousness will shift from being objects of education to objects of learning.

Learning from children is a concrete manifestation of the correct view of children, and it is the implementation of the basic concept of “putting children first” in the “Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers”. It reflects respect for individual children, their autonomy and initiative, and their imagination and creativity.

Children are individuals with unique personalities, not only with varying levels of development and interests, but also influenced by their family and other environments. This requires us to accept and understand children’s thinking and behavior, learn from them, and explore areas that we have not yet understood or ventured into.

## 2. Willingness to Learn from Children: “On Impulse” or “As Always”

Why learn from children? To answer this question, you can first answer “Why do teachers need to learn?” There are many ways to learn for professional growth, and learning from children is the necessary part of teachers’ professional growth. The ultimate goal of learning from children is to promote the common growth of teachers and children, so it is not a “whim” but “as always”.

### 2.1 Children Have Qualities and Knowledge that Teachers Do Not Possess

Children themselves have qualities that we do not have. We often see young children stopping by an ant on the ground, asking questions about the hiding places of fish swimming in the canal, and being amazed by the bursting pods of wisteria. These small surprises in life have become 'useless' in the eyes of adults, lacking the opportunity for children to explore. This curious quality is exactly what we lack now.

Knowledge is somewhat unbelievable, how can a teacher's knowledge be inferior to that of children? In practice, I have deeply realized that children's knowledge is greatly influenced by their families. Many young children are very interested in dinosaurs. They have read a lot of books and visited extensively, and are very familiar with the names and living habits of dinosaurs. In addition, influenced by their parents' work, Rongrong children often share the knowledge they learned at their mother's hospital in the role area of the kindergarten hospital. The "20ml syringe is not for injection, it is for dispensing medicine, don't be afraid" is what Rongrong taught to teachers and other children.

### 2.2 Children Can Become More Confident

When children realize that someone is learning from them, especially teachers who are learning from them, they will be more confident in expressing their opinions and completing certain tasks, and a sense of competence and achievement will arise. As a result, I have confidence in other things and am more willing to try.

En En always takes leave after I enter the middle class, and occasionally comes to the kindergarten to play on my own. I observed that he likes the toy of "train tracks" and always manages to build new routes with his own designs. In the regional activity sharing session, I asked En En to share with the whole class and tell everyone, "I learned with him where to consider when designing routes, which can facilitate people's travel." En En also became confident in his presentation, detailed his ideas to everyone, and began to try the building block area that he had not been to before.

### 2.3 Teachers Can Heal 'Childhood Self' and 'Own Childhood'

The author of *The Little Prince*, Saint Exupéry,

said in his dedication: Dedicated to the adults who were once children. We all come from childhood, but as we grow older and gain more experience, we become tired of the trivialities of life and overlook the fact that we were once children. Many psychological studies have shown that childhood has a huge impact on people. Many eccentric behaviors and distorted psychology are related to childhood, as 'childhood determines life in adulthood'.

Professor Liu Qingchang pointed out that the mistakes and obstacles our children make and encounter now are actually those we have encountered ourselves, but we have completely forgotten them. Our childhood is the childhood of the children we see today. Learning from children is equivalent to learning from ourselves, and education is ultimately self-education.

Many psychological counseling sessions require us to awaken childhood memories, and repairing unpleasant childhood memories is a form of self healing. There are many things that have happened to us, who are also children, in children. Watching their handling and thinking of things can awaken our memories of childhood, and help us accept ourselves who made certain decisions in childhood, as well as better accept our entire childhood, realizing that "beautiful" and "unpleasant" memories together make up a unique childhood. American psychologist Alison Gopnik believes that childhood allows us all to be ourselves.

### 2.4 Teachers Can Better Understand Children

The "Guidelines for Preschool Education (Trial)" points out that teachers should become supporters, collaborators, and guides of children's learning activities. When learning from children, teachers will inevitably interact with them with care, acceptance, and respect, patiently listen, and strive to understand their thoughts and feelings. By sensitively capturing children's thoughts and feelings, we deepen our understanding of their thinking and behavioral characteristics, which also facilitates better guidance for our own teaching.

When encountering the problem of "no patients" in the role area of the preschool hospital, teachers and children discussed solutions. Some children suggested the idea of "making follow-up calls", and the teachers also expressed their approval. However, despite the absence of patients in the past few days, the children still did not have the game plot of

“making follow-up calls”. When I asked the child this question during our conversation, Qiqi said, “Teacher, you said you could make a follow-up call, but you didn’t. Who can I call without a call?” Then, Xiaojie and other children used the building blocks in the construction area to replace it, and it was a nurse and a doll’s house. Later, the child further decorated the building block phone.

In this case, I deeply feel the characteristics of children’s concrete image thinking. Not all children can find solutions by replacing things with things after discovering problems. Teachers and children only proposed the method of “making follow-up phone calls”, but did not further raise specific questions about “what can be used for phone calls”. The child did not see the phone, so he couldn’t think of this scene or was helpless when he thought of it.

#### *2.5 Create an Open, Democratic, and Warm Learning Atmosphere*

Learning from children can demonstrate a humble attitude towards learning. Teachers’ willingness to listen to others’ opinions has played a role as role models, and over time, a learning atmosphere of mutual learning and emulation will be formed in the class. In this atmosphere, children feel that teachers are not omnipotent or absolute authority, and they need to constantly learn. They can also find answers and share them with teachers through other channels. Thus, the democratic classroom learning and living atmosphere unfolded.

#### **3. What to Learn from children: ‘Obvious’ or ‘Hidden’**

If teachers are learning from children as always, then the content they are learning from children is evident in their daily lives. We will discover learning qualities such as curiosity and creativity in children, as well as natural and cultural knowledge that we have not been involved in, and unique ways of thinking.

Professor Gao Zhenyu proposed from the perspective of children’s philosophy that four aspects should be learned from children, namely, children possess four traits: the first trait is curiosity (surprise or astonishment); The second trait is physicality, where children explore themselves, nature, and society through their own bodies or senses, thereby shaping their spiritual world; The third trait is instinct. For children, asking questions, exploring, and even asking philosophical questions is an instinctive

or innate desire, and questions are essential for children; The fourth trait is innocence. Children are not only good at capturing or discovering things and their surprises, but their judgments on things are also less constrained by prejudice, experience, and knowledge, and they can come up with many surprising new insights.

Because adults are more susceptible to the influence of acquired knowledge, experience, or habits, forming fixed thinking patterns, they are less likely to change or correct their inherent views, and are also less likely to come up with creative insights. Therefore, when we let go of our own “known” and adopt a positive attitude towards learning from children, the learning qualities, direct experience of learning methods, instinctive questioning, and insights brought by innocence in children are all the content we need to learn.

#### **4. The Method of Learning from Children: Imitation or Reconstruction**

The main learning methods for children include observational learning, imitative learning, operational learning, experiential learning, and communicative learning. The “Guidelines for Learning and Development of 3-6 Year Old Children” point out that young children acquire experience through three basic methods: “direct perception, practical operation, and personal experience”. Nowadays, can teachers learn from children’s learning methods? When we change our educational concept and no longer just think about how to teach, but also start thinking about how to learn, every aspect of our daily life is a good opportunity for learning.

##### *4.1 Observation Based Learning: Courage to Show Weakness, “Observation + Recording”, Experience the Purity of Education*

Changing one’s role makes it easier to observe children’s words and actions, and also makes it easier to reflect on one’s own problems as a teacher.

During a regional event, I walked up to the table in the art area and sat down. Qiu Shuo asked me, “Do you want to draw?” “I also want to draw, but I can’t draw, and my drawings are particularly ugly.” “If you want to draw, I’ll go get you some paper and try it out. It’s okay.” Before I could answer, Qiu Shuo had already gone to get me some paper. Soon, Suisui, who was holding her own colored pen, came over with him. Emotions are hard to resist, so I had to draw something, otherwise it would waste the

children's kindness, "I thought to myself."

But what's the point of drawing? I took a picture book from the reading area and searched for it. Qiushuo pointed to a picture and said, "Teacher, draw this!" "This is too difficult, I don't know where to start drawing?" Suisui saw me flip to the next page and said, "Why don't you draw this?" "I don't like this, I'll look for it again." Yifei standing beside said, "Oh, do you let the teacher find it yourself."

"Okay, I'll draw this flowerpot!" The few people around me said together. "Okay, this flowerpot looks great."

I will first observe the flowerpot in the painting, which is mainly brown with black clumps resembling marble. So, after drawing the border, I sporadically painted some black first, and then covered the black with brown to present the pattern style. At this moment, the voices of children kept coming from the side, "Teacher, this flowerpot is drawn very well, you need to have confidence!" "It's just that it looks really good, I can't even draw it like this." "Teacher, keep drawing!" Next, I directly used crayons to draw the tree trunks and leaves in the flowerpot. When I chose the color of the leaves, Suisui and a few other children were giving me ideas. There are two leaves painted in different positions from the picture book. Han Yuanjun walked over and said, "The painting doesn't look good at all. There are no leaves in the picture book." Upon hearing this, Suisui, who had been standing beside him, said, "The teacher's drawing is pretty good, there's no need to be exactly the same as in the picture book." Qiushuo also said, "Teacher, don't listen to him, you draw very well".

Encouraged by the children, I finally completed this painting. It has been 15 minutes since then. I, who am not good at painting, have actually been painting so seriously for a long time. But the reason why I am able to sit here and draw diligently today is entirely due to the encouragement of the children.

I found that throughout the entire process, there was a democratic and open atmosphere where children could feel that they were equal to their teachers, and when teachers exposed their weaknesses, children were more encouraged and trusted. My unintentional 'weakness' has shown me the empathy of children, who have truly achieved the goal of caring for and respecting others for 5-6 year old children in the

social field as outlined in the 'Guidelines'. They are able to pay attention to the emotions and needs of others and provide help within their abilities. Therefore, teachers not only need to create a suitable material environment for young children, but also create a warm, relaxed, equal and open psychological environment for them, giving them opportunities to care for and help others. They will give you a surprising love with their actions and words!

During the process, the children suggested that I draw different paintings and choose different colors, but I gave them reasons why I didn't choose. It's worth noting that none of them forced me to choose, even though I didn't follow their advice, they still encouraged me. I have found that children's lives do not have so much stubbornness, sometimes it is adults who impose their ideas on them. If a child is drawing while an adult is watching, can we provide timely care and assistance to them, encourage and support them even if they do not follow our advice, and observe from an appreciative perspective for up to 15 minutes. Sometimes it's because we don't respect the ideas and wishes of young children, we don't support what they persist in, and we don't have the patience to appreciate their small steps of growth!

#### *4.2 Problem Based Learning: Skillfully Using Doubts, "Questioning + Listening", Understanding Children's Thinking*

After lunch together, Sisi and Shuoshuo were playing with snowflakes, wearing their pre made crowns on their heads and saying they looked like princesses. So, the two of them asked me what kind of princess they both knew. I casually said 'Princess Taiping'. I didn't expect Sisi to burst out laughing. I was very puzzled and curious, asking: What's wrong, why are you laughing? This is Sisi still smiling and saying, "Princess Taiping, she's just an old lady swaying on the bridge to maintain balance. It's so funny, haha." Sisi's explanation caused laughter from the children around her, and also triggered my thinking.

I excitedly said, 'Well, let's play a game and I'll say a word. Can you tell me what you think?' 'Okay, I'll go first!' So, the children gathered around me waiting for me to say the word. I deliberately say words that they may not have heard before, in order to facilitate their autonomy and creativity, without being constrained by previous experience. And after I

say it, the child immediately expresses what answers given to me by the children. they are thinking without thinking. Here are the

**Table 1.**

Serial number	Words (Idioms)	Children's explanation
1	Princess Taiping	The old lady walked unsteadily on the bridge to maintain balance.
2	exquisitely carved	There is a dragon named Linglong who kicked a ball.
3	Cangshan Erhai Lake	The hamster was swimming in the sea and saw a mountain climb up and then fall down.
4	creating something out of nothing	A clock was ringing, and someone came and took it away, but the sound was still there.
5	many guests of exalted rank were present	There is a tall shed with many people inside, all seats are full and there are no empty seats.
6	extremely admire	There is a person with a head on the ground and only a body standing on the grass.
7	with no reality whatever	There was a person who felt weak due to stomach pain, and then saw a bird flying in the sky.
8	the wrong person	A person surnamed Zhang, named Zhang Guan, received a "gift bag".
9	a wild profusion of vegetation	(One person) ate two potatoes and two scallions.
10	Minds think alike	There is something in my heart called 'Lingxi', which has hands and feet that allow it to do things it loves.
11	be of no great importance	a. There is a person named 'irrelevant' who is responsible for important matters b. Someone called it irrelevant, he got sick and went to take medicine
12	carry out with drive and sweep	a. Thunder struck, and the wind started blowing b. The wind blew away the thunder c. Someone was very fierce and arrived at their destination quickly

After a brief yet meaningful brainstorming session with the children, I was impressed by their naive ideas and extraordinary imagination. Based on the responses of young children in the conversation, there are several characteristics. Firstly, due to their lack of systematic literacy, young children are very sensitive to pronunciation. When understanding, they will associate "sound" with "character", then associate "character" with "meaning", and finally connect the "meanings" of several characters together as a complete explanation. For example, exquisite and translucent, throwing oneself to the ground. Secondly, young

children's understanding of new words is mostly explained based on "nouns". From their answers, it can be seen that they are all based on concrete material explanations such as an object or a character. After inputting this word, the young child's brain appears to present a "picture" with a strong visual sense. For example, Cangshan and Erhai Lake, creating something out of nothing. Thirdly, young children will explain some adjectives based on their previous experience. For example, young children may interpret the word "virtual" in "ethereal" as "a person's stomach hurts", which is probably related to their previous experience



of “being sick and having a weak body”.

Through this conversation, I have gained new insights into the design of language activities in the future: firstly, young children are interested in language and writing, and can use idioms, antonyms, and allegorical sayings that contain excellent traditional culture and are interesting as learning materials for them. Secondly, we can leverage the thinking characteristics of young children at this time to help them understand some words or idioms that can be explained using “pictures”. For example, if the child is told that “Gaopeng” refers to a distinguished guest, it is estimated that the child can infer based on their own speculation that “distinguished friends fill the seats and describe many guests”. Learning new words or idioms in a way that children can understand can enrich their vocabulary and make their expressions more vivid. In addition, it helps children master the learning method of “starting from the meaning of words and thinking about the meaning of sentences”.

#### *4.3 Communication Based Learning: Enjoying Conversation, “Sharing + Summarizing”, Forming a Learning Community*

Communicative learning enables individual learning and development to go beyond the limitations of individual experience and perspective. Teachers need to overcome differences in role identity, existing psychological states, and cognitive styles between both parties, and engage in dialogue with young children in an equal, open, and cooperative relationship. This can not only help children better understand their thinking, but also enable them to personally experience the benefits of communicative learning.

Firstly, the teacher shares the content they have learned and their thinking process during the learning process, namely “What have I learned? What do I think?” During the activity time, the teacher observes Qiao Qiao playing with a straw puzzle toy. According to today’s plan, he wants to build a house. After the main structure of the house is completed, she compares it with the drawings in the toy and tries to make an openable door. According to the previously used multi head parts, they can only be fixed and cannot be moved. She tried to rotate the fixed door, but it didn’t work. She occasionally rotates the drawings, trying to see the details more conveniently. Then, she searched through the

parts box and found the rotatable parts that could be pressed onto any position of the straw. With a smile, she took out the fixed parts that had been inserted into the straw before. Finally, he showed me, “Look, it’s finally possible to turn!” As I watched from the side, I happily said, “Yes, I also learned how to make a revolving door with you.” After Qiao Qiao shared with everyone, I introduced what I had learned. Today, Qiao Qiao and I learned how to choose rotatable parts to make a revolving door. At first, I didn’t know what to do. Qiao Qiao’s first idea was to look at the drawing, and he looked at it very carefully. One secret was to try changing the direction of the drawing when he couldn’t understand it. Qiao Qiao found that the problem was that he didn’t choose the right part, so he carefully searched and found it. After finding it, he completed it according to the drawing he just saw. Today, Qiao Qiao and I learned how to look at the drawing, find the differences between our own and others’ works, and then adjust it. Qiao Qiao didn’t give up when he encountered difficulties and persisted, which is also what I learned today

Secondly, please ask the children to share the skills they have learned and the thinking process they have gone through in their studies, that is, “What have I learned? How do I think?” When Xu Xu was building the train track, he found that Chang Chang would first think about what is under the overpass when building it? Sometimes it’s a road, sometimes it’s a river. During the sharing session of the regional activity, Xu Xu explained to everyone, “I don’t understand why things need to be placed underneath. Every time I have a flat road, I just build an overpass.” After asking Chang Chang, he found out, “Is it useful to build this bridge? Is it because there is a river below that cannot be crossed, or is there already a road below? Otherwise, why build the bridge? It would be better to just put it on the ground.” Inspired by Chang Chang, Xu no longer built the overpass just for the sake of construction, but began to seek the meaning of construction. Through children sharing and learning with each other, teachers can also better understand how children learn from others.

Finally, build a display platform for children to share their ideas during the off campus phase. Sharing is an effective form of communication and learning, and it is clearly not enough to exist only in regional activities and transitional stages.

In our class, please ask the children to share a good idea before leaving the kindergarten every day. Before Mother's Day, we had an activity where the teacher introduced the origin of Mother's Day, the children talked about their relationship with their mothers, what they could do to wish their mothers a happy holiday, sang and gave gifts, and finally made a handmade expression of their love for their mothers. When leaving the park that afternoon, Jiajia raised his hand to share his good ideas for the day, and he kept smiling as he walked up to the front. My good idea is to go home, close the door, put my backpack in front of me, and watch my mom sing to him. 'Only mom is good in the world,' she would ask, 'Why are you singing?' I would say, 'Today is Mother's Day, I wish you a happy holiday.' Then my mom would be happy, and I would say, 'Look, take out the roses we made today. Mom will definitely be very happy!' Jiajia connected all the ideas we talked about that day in her own way, and planned the details such as putting the backpack in advance. She also made sufficient preparations for the development of the plot and the dialogue between mother and son. This idea made the nearby childcare teacher exclaim, 'I'm already very happy just listening to it.' This plot was also performed in the performance area the next day.

### **5. The Effect of Learning from Children: Confusion or Clarity**

Teachers should reflect on their daily teaching methods and content for young children who express their thoughts in a friendly, disdainful, or peaceful manner. Teachers can better feel the rationality and effectiveness of their daily responses to children when they ask questions to them.

Teachers who learn from children can better understand the psychological activities of being learners in the same environment; I can better feel the purity of education, the way children think, and form a learning community with them, creating an open and democratic learning atmosphere. Learning from children is a concept and path that can promote the common growth of teachers and children, and learning from children can make the professional growth path of teachers clearer.

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