

# **A Narrative Study of Caring Education**

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**Abstract:** *This paper employs two narratives to demonstrate how two Chinese teachers used building and maintaining caring relationship as an effective educational instrument to help their students overcome their specific difficulties in their life-world. The narration displays the wonders and intricacies of implementing caring education at a primary educational level in a middle-sized city in southern China. It provides a number of revealing insights into a better understanding of practicing caring education: 1) to love students as their parents is to fulfill the ethical extension from family to school; 2) love and communication can form a natural nexus and function as an effective caring tool; 3) care in caring relationship is reproductive, reflexive, and interactive; 4) to know students deeper reality is a head start; 5) once caring education is practiced, knowledge instruction or skill training can be embedded integrally on self-formation; and above all, 6) caring education positions students above knowledge or subjects, so the building and maintaining of caring relationship based on care ethics enables teachers to turn pedagogical activities into caring actions, or rather, to use the curriculum as an important means to reinforce the well-being of students' growth and the happiness of students' school experience. These points have important implications not only for advancing caring education cross-culturally but also for making education a humanizing tool.*

**Key words:** *caring education; building and maintaining of caring relationship; implementation; narration; revealing insights*

## **Introduction**

Care ethics has influenced educational theory and practice worldwide particularly since Noddings (2013) translated care ethics into caring education. In P. R. China, after Wei Xiao, a professor in Tsinghua University, introduced care ethics to Chinese academics in late 1980s, many educational researchers, especially the teachers and the postgraduate students at the college of education in Nanjing Normal University, have made tremendous studies on caring ethics and caring education. By and large, those studies focused merely on theoretical exploration and interpretation, yet the following key practical questions remain unanswered: Will caring education work in a Chinese socio-cultural discourse? How do Chinese primary and secondary teachers carry caring education out? What difference will it make to the traditional teaching and learning in China? This paper attempts to showcase the application of caring education at a primary school in Zhanjiang, a port city of Guangdong Province in China and its impact upon those teachers as the ones-caring and the students as the ones-cared for. It is composed of three chief sections, the methodological concerns as its cultural background, the narration its main body, and the conclusion with a critical reflection.

## **Methodological concerns, a cultural background :**

The narration in this paper is taken from the grant research project, “The Cultivation of Caring Personality for Youths in China at the Information Age”, approved and sponsored by China’s Ministry of Education in 2018. Two main research methods were selected for doing the project. One is action research, the other is hermeneutic phenomenology.

Action research is used for carrying out caring education. The 17th Primary School of Zhanjiang (a port city at the western side of Guangdong Province) was chosen as a research base. The principal, the director of the principal’s office, and the teachers who volunteered to participate in the research, formed an action group and became the main practitioners. To learn to build and to maintain caring relationship with students, mapped up by Noddings (2013), was planned and determined as the key task to fulfil.

Hermeneutic phenomenology was used as an approach for data collection and data analysis. There are three main characteristics of hermeneutic phenomenology. First, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach researches into lived experiences (Van Manen 1990), so the data in this project takes the form of lived experiences. Second, hermeneutic phenomenological approach is the attentive practice of thoughtfulness, “A heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life”, as Van Manen drew on Heidegger (*ibid.*, p.12). In other words, the approach is sensitive praxis of meaning-seeking in human lived experiences (*ibid.*). Third, hermeneutic phenomenological enquiry of cannot ensue without a text(*ibid.*). Hence, it is important for teachers to textualise the daily happenings within or outside classroom, to record any thoughts and readings which seemed relevant, as well as conversations with colleagues (*ibid.*). Accordingly, the practitioners were asked to keep a pedagogical journal or a diary as a way of textualization. This process of textualisation lends itself to not only the sensitive observation of the subtleties of teaching and learning in concrete settings but also the avid philosophical reflection of the unique meaning of those pedagogical practices to both teachers and students. In other words, textualization is vitally important because it entails a meaningful assessment of teachers’ educational endeavor by taking into account of students’ engagement of pedagogical activities and its impact upon their

educational experiences. The two narratives as follows come from the two practitioners' pedagogical journals, translated from Chinese into English by the first author of this paper.

### **Narrative 1: Pony's Story (from Xinghua Zheng's Pedagogical Journal)**

#### *Episode One*

*Since China's two-children policy was introduced, many one-child parents have actively responded. Once a small family of three now have changed into a big family of four or five. The pace and tempo of life for those big families have been increasing, and many parents have shifted their attention from the first born to the second born. Hence, the first-born children try hard to maintain their former "status" in their families, and vent various emotions to show their inadaptability. Pony (an anonymous name) in our class is a typical example.*

*Pony had been a disciplined and hardworking student, but at the end of the last semester, his mother gave birth to his younger brother, and he started to become a "problem" pupil, absent-minded in class, unable to complete homework, unwilling to learn, rebellious, and so on. Seeing his situation as such, I thought to myself: if the child continued to indulge in this way, his primary education would be disastrous. Thus, I was determined to help him come back to his normal track.*

*After weeks of effort, I failed to transform Pony. Oddly enough, he seemed to set up a psychological defense against me. Whenever I saw him, he ran away. When I asked him questions, he tried to avoid them. He turned a deaf ear to any words of teaching, such as the importance of becoming a good student. Sometimes he even dared to contradict me. I decided to change my strategy.*

*One day, I went to class to invite him to my office, but he refused. I tried to drag him, yet he sat motionless in his seat with a careless look, pouting his lips in displeasure. Facing his tough attitude, of course, I would not use any harsh punishment to let out my anger, such as beating him without discretion. At the end of my tether, I "intimidated" him that I would announce his bad performance publicly in the class if he continued to contradict me. As soon as my voice fell, he obediently followed me to my office. After he stood for a little while, I went over and touched his head gently: "Miss Zheng (the way I am addressed by my pupils) love the past you so much! Good grades, good performance, positive learning attitude! How come you behave like this now? Can you tell me what happened to you? Why are you becoming so naughty now?" Finally, he uttered his inner grievance with some hesitation. It turned out that after his mother gave birth to his younger brother at the end of last semester, he felt that the whole family only loved his younger brother, only concerned about his younger brother, and never cared about him and loved him as they used to. The feeling of being neglected made him become more and more upset. Accordingly, he did not attend class carefully, did not complete homework on time, and got into trouble with his classmates very often. After he told me his inner thoughts, I said to him softly, "Miss Zheng understand you now. Maybe you are not ready to be an elder brother yet. In fact, your parents always love you, no matter how many brothers and sisters you have got, parents love every child. When you grow up, you will understand." It seemed that he could not fully understand what I was saying, but our chatting made him feel better. He nodded his head to show that he would not act against me.*

*The conversation allowed me to know what was his real problem. After the introduction of the second child policy, maybe many children would have the same experience and feeling like Pony. In fact, many parents shifted their attention from the first-born children to the new born babies. In the past, the first-born children are the only child, so called “little prince” or “little princess” in the family, but the sudden addition of a younger brother or sister and the sudden neglect of them make them feel at loss. If they feel they are gradually ignored by their parents, they will become rebellious or depressed. As a teacher, it is my duty to help Pony to get out of this psychological problem. Frankly speaking, I was not sure what I should do next.*

*In order to know more about Pony, I talked with his mother without delay. Through our We-Chat, I learned from his mother that before she gave birth to her new baby, she had time to accompany Pony, to check his homework, to play with him and so on. But recently, about six months, because of looking after his younger brother, she did not have time to accompany Pony alone. Sometimes, even if she checked his homework, she would hold his younger brother beside him. Pony’s mother said, it seemed that Pony did not like his younger brother very much, she could not understand why he became rebellious gradually. He liked lying, arguing back and sometimes playing computer games under the guise of homework. The only person he feared was his father, but he was too busy to look after him. When I told Pony’s mother what Pony said to me, she seemed to come to her senses. She told me that she did not realize that the birth of a new baby had such a serious impact upon Pony. This reminded me of unreadiness of those mothers with second-born child around me: Before preparing for the second babies, they do not let the first-born children have sufficient psychological preparation, for example, to consult with them, to cultivate the ability of self-reliance for them; while the second babies were born, those mothers only concentrate on them, even do not show the first-born children how to develop brotherhood or sisterhood with the new born babies, in short, they neglect the feelings of the elder children. This sort of inadvertent behavior really hurts the first-born children, it may produce more and more rebellious children like Pony.*

*( September, 15, 2018 )*

#### *Episode Two*

*Perhaps it was duo to last week’s intimate dialogue, today, before the morning reading time, Pony ran to my office to hand in his homework. This was the first time he has finished his homework on time in this semester. Seeing he was in a good mood, I praised him instantly: “Well, it’s a great performance today! If you finish your homework on time every day and listen to class attentively, you will catch up with your desk mate. You know, you two were equally excellent before, but you lag behind in this semester. I hope you continue to work hard, and try to be a good pupil as you once were.”*

*He nodded shyly and then whispered, “Miss Zheng, how many points do I get in my monthly English test this time?”*

*I felt very surprised. He hadn’t asked this kind of questions for a long time. Seeing hope in him, I said to him in a very intimate tone: “You got 72 points this time, are you satisfied with that?”*

*He shook his head.*

*Seeing his embarrassment, I comforted him: “Although your performance this*

*time is not ideal, but it doesn't matter! I can see you have already had a positive attitude, as long as you work hard from now on, take an active part in your learning group's discussion and presentation, and finish your homework on time as you do today, I believe that a smart boy like you will get a higher mark easily in the next test soon. Do you have confidence in yourself?"*

*He hesitated for a while, then nodded yes shyly and went back to his classroom.*

*Pony's performance today made me not only feel happy but also think a lot. If I did not know his deeper reality below his surface behavior, I really did not know where to start the education of him, it is communication that helps.*

*( September, 18, 2018 )*

### *Episode Three*

*Pony started to behave himself and stopped his petty movements in class, but it was still difficult for him to concentrate. He kept his promise of handing in his homework on time only for two days. I did not know why he only restrained himself for such a short period and his previous faults reappeared. Maybe it was because of the nervousness of taking the mid-term exam or the eagerness for quick success.*

*In the second class on Wednesday morning, Pony's desk mate ran to my office and made complaints: "Miss Zheng, Pony grabbed my test papers, and wanted to copy my answers. I refused him, but he hit me." Pony's desk mate was a gentle girl, she was not willing to fight with him. If it were a naughty boy, there would have been a big fight between them, and Pony would have got into a big trouble. I sent the girl for Pony.*

*This time, instead of avoiding me as he did before, he swaggered into my office. I had hardly felt relieved to see him coming to my office before he said hilariously, "Miss Zheng, would you like me to have a cup of tea?"*

*My God, I thought he would have come to make an apology, yet for him, it seemed that nothing had happened. His indifferent and cynical attitude irritated me. I really wanted to criticize him severely. But the very thought of maintaining a dialogical relation with him calmed myself down. At that moment I knew that if I criticized him severely, maybe he would go back to his rebellious state overnight, our dialogical relation would come to a full stop, and I would lose him forever. Thinking of the difficulty of getting closer to him a few days ago, I held back my anger and asked him calmly and seriously, "What do you think?"*

*Hearing my asking, Pony took back his cheeky and boisterous expression and remained wordless, bowing his head, poking his fingers uncomfortably, and looking shyly.*

*Apparently, he was realizing his mischief. I continued saying, but in a friendly manner, "If you're really thirsty, you are welcome to have a cup of tea here. But you should know why the teacher ask you to come here, shouldn't you? Tell me about your test performance. What's the matter?"*

*He was standing still.*

*A few minutes later, I asked him directly, "Why did you hit your desk mate?" He defended himself: "She should have not hidden her test paper, she should have shown me the answers."*

*Ironically, it seemed as if he had a good reason. I had to admonish him, "Good students will not copy other people's answers in the exam. Copying your desk mate is stealing, it is really bad behavior, and it bothers your desk mate as well. If you*

work hard, attend class carefully, you will know right answers by yourself, you do not need to copy others. Furthermore, tell me what makes you outrageous and hit your desk mate?"

He responded, "I want to get more points in the test for my parents, if I get a higher mark, my parents will fulfil one of my strong wishes."

Suddenly I felt how difficult it was to transform a pupil like Pony. We talked for half an hour, although he refused to tell me what his specific wish was, at my strong request, he finally went to his desk mate and made an apology for her.

Although very busy, I called Pony's mother that night. His mother told me that Pony only wrote English homework carefully for two days last week, and then lied that he had no homework or he already finished it in class, hence he slipped by unpunished. Her mother said that she and his father never promised him anything if he got more points in the test. I ended the conversation. By the way, I could sense that his mother was a little upset.

While I put down my cell phone, I became more anxious about Pony's situation and thought aloud: "What on earth is his specific wish? What is his real need? What should I do? What is the right method to educate this particular child?" Once I associated Pony's specific wish with education methods, "a wish card" came into my mind. It was a policy I made for my class to encourage those who had made great progress in school performance. There were three options for each wish card: 1) to earn 30 "learning beans" (the testimony of good school performance); 2) to make a desired request to her/his teacher; and 3) to make a desired request to her/his parents. All of sudden, I got myself off the hook. I decided to use this policy to help Pony.

Tuesday afternoon, after school, I led Pony to my office and told him in a hopeful tone: "Pony, you know, we have a wish card policy, if you can make a great progress, I will grant you a wish card, you can write your wish on a wish card."

"I will try!" Pony responded with shining eyes, and then ran out of my office excitedly.

( September, 30, 2018 )

#### Episode Four

Friday this week, that was the day for our class meeting of the mid-term progress report. As planned, those who had excellent school performance would be awarded, and those who had made a great progress would be given "Wish Cards". Students were excited to wait for my final announcement.

After giving prizes, I asked class, "Dear boys and girls, who has made the greatest progress in this semester?"

"Pony!" the whole class gave a yell of delight.

Indeed, Pony behaved really well for this month, every day from the morning reading to the class discussion, he was active and attentive. I thought he was really looking forward to receiving a "wish card"! At the moment of receiving the wish card, I could see how happy he was!

After the class meeting, I took Pony to my office and asked, "you know, the wish card has three options, which option would you like to prefer?"

"I choose No.2, I would like to make a request to you", he responded.

"How can I help you?" I waited curiously for his answer.

He was looking shy and blush, and answered me in a stiff but low voice, "Miss Zheng, I hope you won't tell my father my shortcomings at tonight's parents' meeting,

will you?"

*At that moment, I was surprised, I never told his father anything about his shortcomings. Meanwhile, my heart ached, pupils cared so much about what teachers say to their parents because teachers' comments may affect their parents' attitude toward them.*

*"I promise, I will not tell anything about your shortcomings tonight. On the contrary, I will tell your father your progress."*

*Pony burst into tears.*

*I gave him a hug and I encouraged him, "Your wish card is obtained through your progress, I hope you continue to work hard, get along with your classmates, I am quite sure you can get an award of excellent school performance next time." No doubt, he took my words seriously.*

*( October 28, 2018*

#### *Episode Five*

*Good habits depend on perseverance. After our class meeting last time, I became very busy, I had no spare time to spend for Pony only, but I kept on observing him. He began to behave himself: obeyed school disciplines, stopped making so many petty movements in class as he did before, attended class in time, finished his homework on time every day, and sometimes read the text aloud with his fellow pupils before class. Although he was absent-minded in my class occasionally, I did not call his name in class, I merely went to his seat and gave him a hint, immediately he calmed down and sat up in an attentive and lovely manner. This was exactly what I had expected to see.*

*The final exam of the semester ended. The day for our last class meeting came.*

*Pony was the first pupil who asked me, "Have I got more than 90 points in English?"*

*I was stunned for a moment when I realized that his English score was really above 90. Then I deliberately teased him, "Only half of the class has more than 90 points. Guess, are you among them?"*

*He replied confidently, "Yes! I have answered all the questions on the exam papers this time. I've been reading English at home every day for the past few weeks, and I've done all the exercises in my exercise book."*

*Listening to his inadvertent answer, I was moved by his change. As I mentioned, he had been a diligent and excellent pupil before his younger brother was born.*

*I announced exam results to the whole class, Pony got 95 in his English exam. Pony claimed to exchange an award for a wish card, I granted him. On the card, he wrote: "Dear teacher, could you please visit my home and tell my parents about my school performance, I want my mother to check my homework and my father take me out to play as they used to."*

*Instantly, Pony's strong wish was clear, he was longing for his parents' company, attention, and care. I fully understood that caring relationship matters for both family life and school education, which takes in-depth communication and ongoing patience. It is the caring relationship with Pony that helped me know him, enter his inner world, and finally guide him. Caring forms caring relationship, and caring relationship makes care more functional and enduring.*

*(January 16, 2019)*

## **Narrative 2: Qiqi's Story (from Miaomei Zheng's Pedagogical Journal)**

### *Episode One*

*As Qiqi's head teacher for three years, I have been deeply impressed by this beautiful little girl. She looks sweet and lovely, and behaves herself at school. However, she cannot complete her homework on time, her ability to look after herself is very poor, and sometimes she is very dependent and weak-minded. For example, today, she even let Grandpa come to the classroom to take the schoolbag for her. Of three main subjects, Chinese, Math, and English, she only completed the homework for Chinese, and her writing is very sloppy. I told her off, but she did not pay attention to my criticism. Finally, I got through to her mother. On the phone, her mother told me: 'Qiqi's father, living apart from her mother, works far away from his home all the year round. I used to live together with Qiqi and her grandparents. But Qiqi's grandmother has prejudices on me. Every time I try to teach Qiqi, her grandmother will stand out to shield Qiqi's faults, and even tells Qiqi not to pay attention to me. She often told Qiqi, "If you are tired, you don't have to do your homework, go to bed first." So Qiqi is very close to her grandmother and does not listen to me, and often fails to finish her homework on time. You know, the grandparents love Qiqi so much that they are reluctant to scold her even if she makes a mistake. Feeling angry and resigned, I have to leave Qiqi's home and go to work elsewhere.'*

*From that moment, I knew Qiqi's family background and understood why she has turned out to be a left-behind child in her grandparents' custody. Meanwhile, Qiqi's grandparents' mollycoddling of her puzzled me. As we all know, along with China's urbanization, many peasants left their homeland and worked in cities to earn more money. For various reasons, most children could not go and live together with their parents and were often looked after by their grandparents or other relatives. Millions of children thus became so called left-behind children, and Qiqi was one of them. Maybe, realizing that Qiqi lacked parental love and care, the grandparents wanted to compensate her loss by looking after her in great detail. They did many things that should have been done by Qiqi herself. In that case, chance of exercising her own ability was cancelled by her grandparents. One afternoon after school, it began to rain, I took the students to the school lobby waiting for parents to pick them up. Holding an umbrella in one hand and the child's hand the other, many parents walked home together with their children. By contrast, Qiqi's grandmother rushed to school with an umbrella, she took out the baby's strap and carried Qiqi on her back. At that time, all the pupils around laughed. Qiqi seemed a little embarrassed, but she didn't want to come down from her Grandma's back. Nearly every day, Qiqi's grandpa accompanies her to school and carries her schoolbag from home to classroom. I could not help thinking: If the grandparents' mollycoddling goes on, Qiqi will be spoiled by her grandparents and become capricious, dependent, and fragile; how can this issue be addressed? How can I make both Qiqi and her grandparents understand the importance of self-reliance and help Qiqi become independent?*

*(November 20, 2018)*

### *Episode Two*

*This morning, I met Qiqi's grandfather on campus, who came to carry Qiqi's schoolbag. Bearing in mind the cultivation of Qiqi's independence, I chatted with her*

grandfather for a while: "I hope that you and Qiqi's grandma could make Qiqi feel the joy of doing things by herself at home. Devoted love is precious for Qiqi, but it does not necessarily mean to arrange everything and to do everything for her. I mean, we can help Qiqi, but we cannot replace her. She should learn to do what she could do by herself. You know how important self-reliance is for people. If you agree, we can cooperate on the cultivation of Qiqi's independence." Her grandfather smiled his consent, and he promised to encourage Qiqi to do things by herself at home.

This afternoon, I called Qiqi to my office. I asked her to sit on a stool beside my desk. Then I asked her to recite the text assigned last week. She recited a short passage in a low voice and stopped. Obviously, she could not recite it. I looked at her face. It was still so cute that I could not bear to criticize her. At the same time, I started to take pity on her, "You can't recite it, can you?"

"No, I can't, teacher," she was still very quiet.

"Did you go home and recite it attentively?"

"Yes, I did."

I asked her gently, "Then why can't you recite it?"

"I don't know. My grandmother didn't watch me." Her answer is always so brief.

I moved my seat closer to her to comfort her, "That's all right. But I'd love to hear you recite the text, will you do that for me?"

"Hmm", she smiled.

I gave her a piece of candy and let her go back to the classroom. Unexpectedly, when she went to the door of the classroom, she suddenly came back and said to me confidently, "Teacher, I'll recite it for you next week! I promise."

I was surprised, laughed, and gave her a thumb's up.

Qiqi's voluntary promise ignited my meditation: 'As a child who is dependent and delicate like Qiqi, the education of self-reliance must start with the experience of the happiness of fulfilling the tasks assigned to her. She volunteers to promise me to recite the text, that means she starts to challenge herself. This is an important step for her. We must help her do what she thinks is hard to do and does not want to do. Then step by step, she will try to do things on her own initiative. Hope this will be a breakthrough.'

(December 15, 2018)

### Episode Three

Since our last talk, Qiqi has become more active and courageous. She dared to raise her hand to answer questions in class these days. It is the first time that I have seen this little girl attending class so attentively. Early this morning, Qiqi and her desk-mate ran to my office to look for me. I was just wondering what happened to them, maybe Qiqi did not hand in her homework, I thought.

Then Mengyao Cheng, Qiqi's desk-mate, broke my puzzlement, "Mr. Zheng, Qiqi said he could recite the text of lesson 22, and she has brought you a packet of delicious biscuits as well."

I laughed, "Very well, come and recite it to me!"

Then, Qiqi recited the whole text fluently.

"It's a good girl to keep her promise!" I stroke her braids gently and went on saying, "Qiqi, you have made such an amazing change. I am really happy for you. Thank you for bringing me a good morning!"

*She blushed with shy and smile, looking particularly cute. I took out my chocolate and the biscuits she gave me, sharing with her and her desk-mate Mengyao Cheng, we had a really good time together.*

*Recently, Qiqi has made a great progress not only at school but also at home. Every time her grandfather saw me, he greeted me with a smile. He told me he and Qiqi's grandmother encouraged Qiqi to do things on her own initiative at home. From the moment of completing the reciting assignment, Qiqi experienced the success through her own efforts and felt the joy of being recognized by her teacher and classmates. This might give rise to her sense of self-pride and become a powerful motivation for her as well. I feel determined to keep up the communication with Qiqi's grandparents and parents, to advance family-school cooperation, and to make caring relationship extended from school to family, or vice versa.*

*(December 28, 2018)*

#### *Episode Four*

*This week was the revision week for the final exam. All the pupils were busy reviewing their lessons, Qiqi was no exception. During this week, Qiqi became more sensible and diligent. For example, she sat up straightly in class and her writing improved a lot.*

*In this morning, I finished my first class and went back to the office to continue my lesson preparation. After the third class, Qiqi came to me with her exercise book. She first stuck her head in at the door of the office and asked, "Teacher, may I come in?"*

*I waved her in.*

*"Teacher, I copied the text during my break in PE class. You check it!" Her voice was soft and she looked very serious.*

*I smiled at her and took her exercise book. When I saw her neat handwriting, I was very happy and immediately encouraged her: "Qiqi, you're the first to finish your homework! Come on, good girl, I wish you can get good grades in the final exam."*

*She smiled shyly, and a cute shallow dimple appeared on each of her cheeks. After saying goodbye to me she went home.*

*The final exam results came out, Qiqi made great progress. All of sudden, I realized that the true reason why Qiqi stayed behind in school performance was because she lacked the care from parents and teachers. In fact, every child is longing for love from adults. Realizing this, I tried to make Qiqi understood that her parents, grandparents, the other teachers and I, we all love her very much. Meanwhile, I contacted Qiqi's mother again, Qiqi's mother informed me of Qiqi's performance at home. Qiqi tried to look after her by herself and become independent and brave. For example, she ate meals without her grandma's help, she slept without Grandma's company, she said she slept by herself but no longer felt lonely and scared.*

*(January 12, 2019)*

#### *Episode Five*

*Qiqi's learning attitude improved a lot this semester. When this semester began, her father brought her to school for registration. After a winter vacation, the girl grew taller, and became more understanding and polite. It was really a delight to listen to her talking the interesting things she did during the vacation. It was now*

only the third week of this new semester, but the girl's learning motivation was growing.

This morning, we issued the test paper for the first unit, Qiqi got another "A"(Excellent), I praised her in the class: "Well done, Qiqi! From the last semester to this semester, you have forged ahead with your academic performance, and your character is improving as well."

The whole class gave her thunderous applause, and I applauded too.

Yihong Su, a learning group leader in our class, said something important: "Teacher, Qiqi has made great progress, and she is no longer delicate. Every day she hands in her homework on time, and find time to help Biwei Guan do her exercises. So, I suggest, we can make Qiqi a learning group leader."

Qiqi blushed with a little embarrassment and smiled at Yihong Su.

Yihong Su's suggestion reminded me of creating a chance to practice Qiqi's caring ability and interpersonal skills. Then I asked Qiqi, "Would you like to be a learning group leader?"

She nodded and smiled. Finally, Qiqi was surrounded by her group members, who were studying Qiqi's test paper and muttering in a low voice excitedly. From that moment on, Qiqi became a learning group leader, in charge of sending and receiving homework, checking the attendance of every group member, and reporting every group member's school performance to me.

Classmates' appreciation and affirmation could be the source power of a pupil's continuous progress. Qiqi was elected a learning group leader. That meant she won appreciation and affirmation from her classmates. Later on, from her classmates' trust and support, she could feel another kind of fraternal love she had never experienced. This fraternal love would lead Qiqi to move a step further, to focus not merely on academic achievement but also on caring her fellow pupils.

(March 23, 2019)

#### *Episode Six*

The role of a learning group leader changed Qiqi a lot. Every day, Qiqi carried her schoolbag to school by herself, so I had not seen Qiqi's grandfather for quite a while. After entering the classroom, Qiqi would voluntarily pick up the broom and sweep the floor. She did her homework very well. Very often she showed me her composition and asked me to refine it. Sometimes she would discuss with me some minor life problems she comes across at home and school. I had an impression that Qiqi become more and more understanding.

Qiqi's mother and I, we shared mutual trust each other. She told me that she divorced Qiqi's father and got remarried. This semester she gave birth to a baby girl in her new marriage. As soon as she came out of the delivery room, she texted me the message. I was happy, but I was worrying: If she had a new baby in a new family, maybe she would care less about Qiqi? I couldn't help feeling for Qiqi. However, I was wrong. Qiqi's mother did not reduce her love for Qiqi in the slightest. As soon as her new baby was one-month old, she flew back to Qiqi from far away alone with her new baby in the swaddle, and she was going to accompany Qiqi to spend the coming summer vacation. Fortunately, Qiqi had a good mother, who cherish school education and actively cooperates with teachers.

Today, Qiqi's mother came to school with her baby. As we were having a lesson in class, she sat in the corridor and waited for us with her new baby in her arms for

more than an hour. After class, I followed Qiqi to the corridor to see her mother. Qiqi was a little shy at first, then she held her baby sister tightly and affectionately in her arms, singing a happy song to please her. Apparently, she was looking after her baby sister with great care, in her bright eyes, there was happiness glowing.

Seeing such a happy scene, my heart was deeply touched. All these bits and pieces about Qiqi's recent change started to appear in my mind as if I was seeing a film: the figure of her grandpa when he used to carry Qiqi's schoolbag to classroom, the figure of Qiqi when she was reciting the text to me, the figure of Qiqi when she was sweeping the floor in the classroom.....

From Qiqi's story, I have learned the following. Firstly, Qiqi's caring personality develops in the interactive process of being loved and cared (by her parents, grandparents, and teachers) and her caring her baby sister as an elder sister and her classmates as a learning group leader. In fact, the world of happiness is an interweaving network of being cared by others and caring others based on love and trust. Secondly, while feeling love from others, Qiqi tries to give back her own love to others. In this process of taking and giving, Qiqi experienced happiness. This is true love because true love is not only reproductive but also reflexive. However, grandparental or parental mollycoddling is not true love. It is one-sided indulgence. Thirdly, family education and school education must be closely integrated, the more teachers communicate with parents, the more they will know about their pupils. Just by means of this kind of fruitful cooperation, caring relationship either at home or at school will grow much more powerful and educative.

(April 13, 2019)

### **Conclusion:**

The above narration deepens our understanding of caring education implemented outside U.S.A. The story of Pony shows us the social impact upon those children once two children policy was introduced, and the story of Qiqi illustrates the problems those left-behind children encounter, such as grandparents' mollycoddling. Building and maintaining caring relationship was employed as a strategy to help those who like Pony and Qiqi overcome their difficulties. The narration brings a vivid picture of the two teachers' educational commitment and unyielding effort. It again gives strong validation to what bell hooks (1994) once remarked, "To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (p. 13). For furthering the implementation of caring education at an international level, the following points are noteworthy to conclude in a way of critical reflection.

Firstly, in Chinese culture, "once a teacher, always a parent", that is, a teacher is believed and expected to share the same type of love and duty with a parent. This kind of understanding matters because it is a question of if students can experience happiness at school or not. In other words, if students can feel love and care from their teachers, they will enjoy their school life; otherwise, their schooling experience will become unhappy or even miserable. Hence, educational experience will severely affect the growth of students. According to Noddings (2013), for students, teachers' love and duty are an ethical extension of parental love and duty. This ethical extension in this concrete context, as the narration shows, is the substitute for the absence of parental love and care that students longed eagerly for. This makes implementing and reinventing caring education

based on care ethics more fundamental.

Secondly, the building of caring relationship starts from knowing students' deeper reality behind surface behavior. Therefore, it required each teacher to keep attentive to the idiosyncrasy of the individual student, and to determine the unique need of this or that particular student in concrete pedagogical situations. This determination cannot be fulfilled without a thorough consideration of the complexity of each student's unique learning background, such as her physical, psychological, and socio-cultural conditions. It is important for teachers to become sensitive to daily happenings within or without classroom. Of course, this demands teachers' patience.

Thirdly, the key constituent elements for building and sustaining caring relationship are love and communication. The two elements can form a natural nexus that touches the common basis of every teacher's pedagogical experience. It helps teachers knock down the separation wall between schools and families, and thereby to make school-home cooperation more effective. Of course, the natural nexus opens up many a great possibility of implementing and reinventing caring education at schools all over the world.

Fourthly, care without caring relationship is accidental, casual, sporadic, and single-sided, whereas care in caring relationship is interactive, reflexive, reproductive, and enduring. While the student as the one-cared-for feels love and care from the teacher as the one-caring, she wants to pay back love and care in her own way. That is, the teacher's care of the student's wellbeing of growth in teaching may result in the student's active and positive engagement in learning. This process of interaction of care is not only academic but also emotional and moral. Therefore, caring education is able to integrate knowledge instruction and skill training into students' *Bildung* (self-formation), and thus to make teaching culturally nourishing for students' personal development.

Fifthly, teachers' care is forever not even, those disadvantaged may get more help and support from teachers. Of course, this does not mean those top students may get less cared. Admittedly, the problem is that if the class size is too big (for example, 50 or more students in a class), it is hard for a teacher to keep a caring relation with every student. Therefore, how to carry out caring education in a big-sized class requires more researches and actions.

Last but not the least, caring education positions students above knowledge or subjects, and it emphasizes students' happiness in educational experience, the building and maintaining caring relationship is therefore to turn pedagogical activities into caring actions. This can be the most fundamental way of making schooling a humanizing tool. It requires to treat teaching and learning in classroom as culture-in-making, and to use the curriculum as an effective means for students' individual sense-making. In so doing, the organization of educational activities must follow a bottom-up approach, that is, to reject the domination of the authority of teachers and textbooks, but to uphold the children-centered activities and practices.

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