

The Lifeworld: Teaching Experience of Rural Teachers in China

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Abstract. In recent times, there has been a growing interest in the research of rural teachers, coinciding with the advancements in rural education. As research progresses, the investigation of rural educators has evolved beyond a narrow emphasis on their professional identity to encompass a holistic comprehension of their overall living conditions. This article is grounded in the phenomenology of lifeworld theory and endeavors to portray the genuine and comprehensive teaching lifeworld of rural educators through the utilization of living experience research methods.

1 Introduction

In recent years, rural education has undergone significant changes due to urbanization construction and policy adjustments such as "merging and closing schools." As a result, rural schools have been continuously adapting to these changes. Based on extant literature, rural educators play a crucial role in modifying the physical arrangement of educational institutions and serve as a noteworthy attraction for pupils hailing from rural regions. Notwithstanding the significance of rural teachers' status, they continue to experience a dearth of fundamental resources. Conversely, extant literature exhibits a dearth of focus on the daily experiences of rural educators. Hence, directing focus toward rural educators and their encounters holds both theoretical and practical importance in examining their genuine way of existence.

2 The Theory of Lifeworld and the Teacher's life experience

From a phenomenological standpoint, individuals are continuously undergoing all the occurrences within their lifeworld. The lifeworld constitutes the primary source and basis of the educational realm, serving as the fundamental locus for educators to acquire experiential knowledge [1]. Thus, by emphasizing discourse of the lifeworld, it can be broadly comprehended that the lifeworld posits the inseparability of external human conduct and cognitive processes from the lifeworld. This methodology has the potential to enhance comprehension and introspection of the authentic circumstances of educators, as well as promote active involvement with their encounters.

Husserl (2005) introduced the notion of the "lifeworld" and posited that it accentuates the intuitive manifestation of entities. He contended that the acquisition of sensory knowledge through unmediated interaction with objective

entities is intuitive. The fundamental and most abundant significance of existence inevitably emanates from sensory experience. It is commonly understood that comprehension and appreciation of the dynamic nature of our world precede the acquisition of concepts and regulations [2]. In this scenario, the realm of a teacher is a tangible and perpetually developing realm that is inherently perceived by the teacher. Educators possess a firsthand perception and comprehension of the multifaceted milieu in which they operate. Therefore, when examining instructors in rural areas, it is imperative to immerse oneself in their daily experiences and empathize with their present emotional state. Moreover, the concept of lifeworld pertains to a dynamic and tangible environment where communication takes place exclusively within a distinct, human, and collective lifeworld [3]. Both Van Manen (1982) and Heidegger (2004) underscore the irreplaceability of educational contexts. Every instance of educational engagement is characterized by its unique liveliness, featuring the active participation of teachers and students, the utilization of educational materials, and the interaction between students themselves, all within an authentic educational setting [4]. The attainment of mutual understanding between the communicating parties is facilitated by their respective real-life encounters, which is essentially the mechanism through which experience is acquired. This is supported by existing literature [5]. The investigation into the instructional circumstances of rural educators arises from their experiential realm, wherein a sequence of lively encounters enables them to cultivate a subjective comprehension of their environment.

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3 A Representation of the Teaching Life Experience of Rural Teachers

The term "teaching life" pertains to the pedagogical and occupational pursuits of educators. It constitutes a fundamental aspect of the professional lives of educators. The teaching experiences of rural educators are distinct due to the particularity of their vocation and their existence within the rural educational milieu.

3.1 The assumption of the teacher's 'role series' identity

Fu Songtao (1994) introduced the notion of "role series" in his work titled *New Theory in the Sociology of Education*. This term refers to a collection of internalized social responsibilities, patterns of behavior, values, and social entitlements that are expected of individuals based on their social position or status within the field of education. In the realm of sociology, these expectations are commonly referred to as social roles. The term "role series" refers to the assortment of social roles that an individual concurrently undertakes.[6]. Through the process of observation and interview, it was discovered that educators assume not only the responsibility of imparting knowledge, but also function as surrogate parental figures. Conversely, it is also possible for a single teacher to instruct multiple subjects.

According to Teacher Li, a professional in the field of general subject, the approach taken toward the treatment of these students is akin to that of a parental figure. He instructs them with patience on the fundamental principles of ethical conduct. Daily, Mr. Li provides his students with reminders to prioritize their safety, exercise caution around water, and attend to their physical and mental well-being. As a result, Teacher Li has been actively engaged in educating his students in diverse areas, including fostering effective study habits, promoting mindfulness, and fostering a constructive teacher-student dynamic. In his capacity as an educator, he has assumed the responsibilities of a caregiver. In the interim, it was noted that a significant number of educators exhibited proactive behavior by providing aid to students in laundering their soiled garments through the facilitation of access to the nearest on-campus sink. The aforementioned scenario was noted by Teacher Shen as being quite prevalent. Rural educators exhibit a strong affection for their pupils and proactively attend to their daily needs, thereby demonstrating that they not only fulfill the primary function of "teaching," but also assume the parental responsibility of "nurturing" that is typically associated with familial education. Furthermore, within the chosen educational institutions, it is common for the majority of teachers to instruct two or even three subjects, with only a small number of senior educators specializing in a single subject. Additionally, it is prevalent for instructors to teach subjects outside of their area of academic expertise. Teachers in rural areas are often required to teach subjects outside of their area of expertise due to a lack of educational resources. This can result in teachers having to relinquish their professional skills and teach subjects with which they may be unfamiliar or have

yet to gain prior experience. In such instances, educators are required to assume not only the position of a mathematics instructor but also that of a science educator.

The functional identity of modern teachers can be attributed to the reason why they assume the roles of both teachers and parents. One common feature of contemporary society is the delegation of educational duties from the household to specialized establishments, with schools serving as the primary recipient of such institutions. In this scenario, educators serve as intermediaries tasked with imparting formal instruction within the educational institution. In the context of rural society, the educational objects encountered exhibit distinct characteristics. The issue of "left-behind" children resulting from parental migration for employment represents an underlying inadequacy in familial education and a disconnection from rural education. Hence, educators are required to assume additional responsibilities. The practice of instructing multiple subjects or assuming responsibility for all subjects in lower grade levels is a result of insufficient educational resources in rural locales, necessitating that rural educators undertake multiple roles to address staffing shortages.

3.2 The rigid application of the "urban standards" evaluation system

The "Urban Standards" assessment framework primarily pertains to the standardized criteria utilized for evaluating the educational proficiency of teachers with urbanization. The evaluation system tends to marginalize rural teachers, posing a challenge to the recognition of their distinct identities within this specific context.

Despite their location in remote areas outside of urban centers, rural schools are subject to formalization and standardization, meaning that the work of rural teachers is not unregulated or isolated. The Education Bureau conducts inspections regularly, with a higher frequency than what was observed during my previous teaching experience in the city. To comply with inspection standards, it is necessary to modify the instructional tempo and execute illustrative sessions. According to Teacher Huang, certain subjects that require comprehension through dialect may necessitate the use of Mandarin for communication. Furthermore, educators must produce a multitude of work summaries daily following their lessons in order to adhere to established guidelines. However, it is possible that these summaries may not align with the teaching practices commonly utilized in rural areas. In light of the recent focus on rural education, governmental entities have augmented their backing and administration of rural education and educational institutions. Nonetheless, this level of attention appears to be cursory and has yet to explore the realm of education in rural areas. The approach solely depends on enhancing assessment and scrutiny, and the assessment material is also grounded on the stringent metrics of the initial "urban standard."

Educators who work in rural areas are often stationed in these regions for extended periods, and as a result, they are subject to the influence of the local culture and educational customs. Consequently, they exhibit distinct characteristics and are influenced by specific contextual factors.

This phenomenon is primarily manifested in their rural life encounters, which are shaped by the prevailing local culture. Their teaching methods and dissemination of textbook knowledge to students are influenced by both their geographic and cultural backgrounds. In educational settings, instructors frequently utilize indigenous resources to enhance students' comprehension of academic content. Furthermore, it is evident in rural settings that there exists a scarcity of fully-equipped multimedia classrooms, with only one such facility available for basic urban modern amenities like multimedia teaching. As a result, educators in these areas often resort to self-preparation of teaching tools. There exist notable disparities in the educational milieu between rural and urban regions. The utilization of "urban standards" as a means of evaluation may result in an oversimplification of the distinct obstacles encountered by rural educators, which are contingent upon their particular identity and contextual factors. Relying solely on the implementation of inspection and evaluation protocols without considering the unique identities of rural teachers and environmental factors may not offer a comprehensive resolution to the problem at hand.

3.3 Tailored use of teaching tact following local conditions

Liu Ye (2008) posits that the concept of teaching tact pertains to the capacity of an educator to expeditiously and judiciously modify their approach in light of the dynamic and evolving educational milieu [7]. Given that teaching and learning are dynamic processes that involve reciprocal engagement between educators and learners, the educational milieu is subject to continual transformation, thereby necessitating that instructors confront occasional occurrences throughout their pedagogical endeavors. In light of the distinctive circumstances of rural schools and the specific educational objectives of their students, the author has noted that rural educators must employ greater pedagogical creativity in their instructional practices and adapt their approaches to unforeseen circumstances through the use of context-specific educational ingenuity.

Ms. Huang shared a noteworthy pedagogical encounter wherein she aimed to employ the phrase 'Chinese hamburger' to denote 'roujiamo,' a renowned culinary delicacy originating from Xi'an, during an English lesson that centered on culture and gastronomy. Upon inquiry regarding the preferred local cuisine of the students, the unanimous response was 'diaoloushaobing', a distinctive delicacy originating from their respective hometowns. The lesson was modified by utilizing a regional specialty to elucidate the course material, resulting in a higher level of efficacy compared to conventional methods. This is a common situation in which the skill of teaching tact is employed. An educator adeptly integrates textbook information with regional cultural nuances and skillfully applies this knowledge to local circumstances, thereby enhancing students' comprehension of pertinent subject matter and its practical applicability to their everyday experiences[8]. The presence of educational humor implies the presence of educational activities within the given context. In the

context of changing circumstances, such as those encountered in rural schools, there arises an inherent need to employ pedagogical ingenuity. Rural schools are situated in rural localities and exhibit distinctive characteristics in contrast to their urban educational counterparts. Given their geographic location and the ongoing advancement of contemporary urbanization, it is imperative to differentiate them from conventional educational environments. In such circumstances, educators in rural areas must employ pedagogical strategies that are effective in addressing the challenge of imparting knowledge that may not be congruent with the rural context. Conversely, owing to the distinct attributes of rural schools, including variations in instructional resources and significant regional cultural impacts, rural educators must incorporate a greater degree of engagement with the local rural culture and society while implementing pedagogical approaches[9].

Regarding the attributes of the pupils, Teacher Huang expressed that when reflecting on the engagement with the students, "Initially, I encountered difficulties in effectively administering this particular class." A group of students exhibited dissent towards all of your statements, and their level of defiance will likely escalate if you adopt a strict approach towards them. The individuals in question exhibited a strong and unwavering stance, necessitating my utilization of assertive emotions such as anger to consistently motivate them. Subsequently, it dawned on me that adopting a more lighthearted approach with my pupils and comprehending their responses to mitigate the circumstance would be advantageous. Rural educators are confronted with the challenge of managing disruptive behavior from students who seek to undermine their authority. To address this issue, teachers may employ various pedagogical strategies, including the use of humor and witty banter, to defuse such incidents promptly and effectively. By doing so, teachers can ensure a conducive learning environment that facilitates uninterrupted instruction. Rural schools encounter a preponderance of pupils who are indigenous youths of suitable age, in part. The educational outcomes of these students are frequently influenced by urbanization, as their parents may be absent from home for prolonged periods due to work commitments or may not prioritize their children's physical and mental well-being due to limited educational attainment. This leads to a particular level of inadequacy in familial instruction[10].

During this period, young learners at the elementary level are in the nascent phase of their physical and cognitive development. Consequently, they necessitate supervision and direction to cultivate positive behavioral patterns. The absence of familial education intensifies proclivities towards noncompliance, resulting in increased classroom incidents and heightened student-teacher discord[9].

4 Conclusion and Future

The preceding accounts indicate that rural educators tend to emphasize interpersonal interactions when recounting their educational experiences. This emphasis pertains not only to objective depictions of events but also to subjective portrayals of affective states[9]. What is the nature of in-

terpersonal interaction? According to Fu Songtao, the interplay between educational and social members can be explained by the amalgamation of action networks driven by education-related intentions and group-based educational endeavors. The aforementioned statement posits that the interplay among educational individuals is shaped by their volitional pursuits, which concurrently comprise the educational volitional pursuits of the education society's operation. When considering an impartial portrayal of personal experiences, rural educators cannot overlook the subject of their interactions and connections with students as a significant aspect of their unique life experiences[8]. The teachers' life experiences are profoundly influenced by their interactions with students, including the experiences and emotions that arise from such interactions. The author's empirical findings, garnered from personal observations and experiences in the field, as well as interviews with educators, affirm that a teacher's life is predominantly characterized by their engagement with students, both in pedagogical and non-pedagogical contexts. Rural educators are tasked with assuming both parental and pedagogical roles, necessitating a heightened investment of time and energy in their pupils. Consequently, this fosters heightened levels of engagement between educators and their pupils, culminating in a more profound affective bond that becomes customary in their interpersonal dynamic[7].

This study raises the question of what motivates rural educators to remain in economically disadvantaged areas, despite their tendency to express dissatisfaction with their circumstances. Despite their grievances, these individuals are often regarded as being highly dedicated to their work. According to Teacher Shen, a long-time resident of a rural school, observing children attending school with joy is a pleasant experience. Observing their happiness brings us a sense of joy.

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