

UNIT 1 TOPIC 5 CHINESE PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION

Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should read Unit 1 Topic 2 and watch some video clips to learn about who Confucius is, why he is considered to be one of the most significant philosophers in ancient history and his concept of education. Students should also read up some articles to understand the importance of education in contemporary China.

Aim and Objectives

Topic 5 aims to provide students with some knowledge of Confucius's contributions to education and the significance of education to the Chinese. It will also equip them with some knowledge of the evolution of education from ancient to modern China. They should be able to identify China's philosophy of education and understand its contemporary social issues through this perspective.

Teaching and Learning Activities

Activity 1

Divide your class into two groups. Have one group work on Confucius and the other on Aristotle. Have each group list down each philosopher's theories on education and how their respective social environments influenced their thoughts on a sheet of wall chart paper. When they have completed the list, put it up on the whiteboard and then have a class discussion on the similarities and differences between the two philosophers' ideologies.

Activity 2

Divide your class into groups of three or four. Have each group prepare a PowerPoint presentation on one of three topics: the function of education in self-cultivation, social morality or leadership. Ensure the number of groups working on each topic is roughly the same as that for the other two topics. Each presentation should last about five minutes.

Activity 3

Watch the video *Eastern Philosophy: Confucius* on YouTube (available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUhGRh4vdb8>) to help your students understand the other theories put forth by Confucius, as well as the society of his time.

You may ask these questions:

- A. What are the theories that you agree with? Tell the class your reason(s).
- B. What are the theories that you don't agree with? Why do you not agree with them? Although you may not agree with these theories, do you think they were reasonable in ancient Chinese society?

Activity 4

Divide your class into groups of three or four. Have each group interview some classmates, friends and neighbours with a Chinese background on the topic of 望子成龙.

They may use these questions for the interview:

- A. What do you think of the concept of 望子成龙?
- B. Have you experienced 望子成龙 personally? If not, have you seen friends experiencing it?

- C. Do you think 望子成龙 is a positive concept? Or is it a conventional concept that may give rise to problems in the modern society?

You may help your students phrase the questions in Chinese and encourage them to conduct the interviews in Mandarin. They may also film the interviews and present them in class.

Activity 5

Have a class discussion on why the idea of 望子成龙 is not popular in Western cultures.

Activity 6

Divide your class into two groups to prepare for a debate on this topic: Learning is a pleasant experience. Encourage them to look at the arguments both for and against. Each group will then select four members to take part in the debate.

Activity 7

Introduce the concept of a Tiger Mum to your class and have your students discuss these questions:

- A. What is a Tiger Mum?
- B. How did Amy Chua become a Tiger Mum?
- C. Do you think her daughters are happy to be the children of a Tiger Mum? Why do you think so?
- D. Would you want to have a Tiger Mum?
- E. Would you become a Tiger Mum or Tiger Dad yourself?
- F. Do you think Amy Chua is representative of all Chinese parents?

Activity 8

Have your students do Exercise 5 of the Workbook according to your teaching needs and progress.

Resources/Materials

Apart from those listed in the activities, you may also consult these resources/materials:

1. *Confucius* (2010). Directed by Hu Mei. Dadi Century (Beijing). (Note: the film is in Mandarin.) Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=el3i3TfNg-I>
2. "Eastern Philosophy: Confucius" (2015). *The School of Life* [YouTube video]. 6 February, 2015. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUhGRh4vdb8>
3. Berger, P. L. (2012), "Is Confucianism a Religion?". *The American Interest* [Online]. 15 February, 2015. Available at: <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2012/02/15/is-confucianism-a-religion/>
4. Amy Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*.

Assessment

1. Collect the notes taken by your students during all group and class discussions.
2. Prepare one or two quizzes.

3. Each student is required to write a 300-word review of a book on Confucius' contributions to education.
4. Each student is required to write a 300-word personal account of his reflections on Chinese philosophy in education.

Workbook Answer Key

1. What is the main concept of Chinese education? What is it based on? Who was its founder?

Students should consider these points:

- Confucius set the tone for Chinese education in a number of important ways:
 - Seeing the provision of universal education as an ideal;
 - Use of merit as a criterion to determine students' access to schools, this being the foundation on which generations of Chinese governments created a comprehensive system of education;
 - Affirming moral training as a key part of education, that such knowledge cannot remain academic, but must be reflected in behaviour;
 - Expecting a good teacher to possess good morals and be an exemplar of those morals;
 - Education being a serious business.
- The curriculum in the teaching of Confucianism was based mainly on the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics*

2. How had Confucius influenced the Chinese philosophy of education?

Students should consider these points:

- Confucianism was further developed by Mencius and Xun Zi. It was in the reign of Emperor Wu during the Han Dynasty that it was given the status of state ideology. Since then, it had been the orthodox doctrine of the Chinese society.
- Confucianism built on an ancient religious foundation to establish the social values, institutions and ideals that came to constitute the traditional Chinese society.
- Confucianism was part of the Chinese social fabric and way of life.
- Confucius valued good teachers who had knowledge of the traditions and practices of the ancient societies.

3. We have learnt that Confucius believed that a good scholar would make a good official. He also believed in giving everyone education without distinction. What are your thoughts on these beliefs?

Students should consider these points:

- The connection between what Confucius advocated and quality education
- An ambitious young man would pursue an arduous course of study in the Chinese classics in preparation for the civil service examination, which required thorough knowledge of the Confucian canon and the ability to write essays on moral issues, current affairs and poems in a variety of formal styles. The candidate thus had to develop talent, worldly sophistication and erudition to become a successful well-rounded literatus. If he passed the examination, he was to enter government service. As a result, the government bureaucracy was composed of rigorously trained scholar-artists; conversely, poets and painters held official positions as powerful politicians.
- The influence of Confucius's ideology of "education for everyone, regardless of their backgrounds" on the promotion of providing free, equal access to quality education for all children, from early learning to secondary education

4. Does Confucius' idea of education still have its influence on the modern education system in China? Explain briefly what kind of influence it is.

Students should consider these points:

- The influence of his ideology of "education for everyone, regardless of their backgrounds" on universal education
- On the all-round development of a student: At home, a young man should be a good son. Outside of the home, he should treat others like his brothers. He should be trustworthy and proper, and keep himself close to people of benevolence and morality. If after all these activities he has any energy to spare, he should read widely to stay cultivated.
- On the integration of theory with practice: I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.
- "The essence of knowledge is, having it, to apply it; not having it, to confess your ignorance."
- "Education breeds confidence. Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace."
- "We may learn wisdom through three ways: First, through reflection, which is the noblest; Second, by imitation, which is the easiest; Third, with experience, which is the bitterest."
- "When I walk along with two others, from at least one I will be able to learn."
- "Acquire new knowledge whilst thinking over the old, and you may become a teacher of others."

5. If Confucius had met Socrates, what kind of conversation might they have?

Students may include these points:

- Their concerns about ethical thoughts
- About moral education
- About the purpose of education
- About the importance of learning
- About the methods of education

6. How is the philosophy of education of the Chinese different from that of Australians or Westerners?

Students should consider these points:

- Differences in aims and objectives
- Differences in curriculum
- Differences in pedagogy and students' learning
- Differences in assessment

7. Why do the Chinese view education as the key to success? Do you agree with this view? Give your reasons.

Students should consider these points:

- Common belief in education as the only path to self-betterment and the best way to achieve social status and mobility
- View of excelling in studies as bring honour to the family

8. Do you think the ideals prescribed by the Chinese saying of 吃苦 and the story of 凿壁借光 are commendable? Why?

Students should consider these points:

- Kuang Heng's method of ensuring he could read in the dark of night is not commendable but his eagerness to learn is.
 - No effort, no results.
 - Only diligence will lead one to the zenith of knowledge and austerity of profession.
9. We have learnt that the idiom 望子成龙 describes Chinese parents' expectations of their children. How do you view these expectations? Do parents in Australia have the same kinds of expectations of their children and why?

Students should consider these points:

- Parents' encouragement and incentives to their child in the context of competitive society
- The way Chinese parents do so is relatively more controversial, resulting in Tiger Mums and Tiger Dads.
- Australian parents also have high expectations of their children but how they push their children is less controversial.

10. Group Discussion

Both Chinese and Western education systems have their pros and cons. In a group of three or four, write down the possible ways of combining these two models to form a new system. Explain briefly why you think this new system may work better.

Students should consider these points:

- Chinese way: emphasis on foundation knowledge, diligence and competition
- Australian way: emphasis on all-round development, involvement in sports and social activities, freedom in curriculum and subject selection

Note: All URLs listed herein were ascertained to be accessible on 8 September, 2020.