

Translating Educator Spirit into Pedagogical Practice: A Framework for Pre-Service EFL Teacher Education in China

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Abstract: Educator Spirit was articulated in China in 2023 as a set of expectations concerning teachers' public commitment, moral conduct, pedagogical wisdom, professional learning, care for students, and cultural responsibility. Its subsequent incorporation into national policy places a direct task before teacher education: how can a broad image of good teacherhood enter the professional learning of student-teachers? This paper addresses this question through a policy-informed curriculum analysis of a pre-service English as a foreign language (EFL) methodology course. It reads recent teacher-education policy alongside research on teacher identity and professional judgment, and develops four connected areas for curriculum design: professional purpose, ethical responsibility, pedagogical judgment, and relational care. Three course sites—classroom management, assessment, and language-and-culture teaching—are used to show how these areas can be worked through as problems of teaching. The paper argues that Educator Spirit gains practical meaning when student-teachers have to explain and revise decisions about real pedagogical situations. This approach connects value education with subject pedagogy and provides a workable route for curriculum-based ideological and political education in pre-service EFL teacher education.

Keywords: Educator Spirit; Pre-service EFL teacher education; Professional identity; Pedagogical judgment; Curriculum-based ideological and political education

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1. Background

In September 2023, China's President Xi Jinping's letter to representatives of outstanding teachers set out six aspects of what was described as the distinctively Chinese Educator Spirit: commitment to the country, exemplary moral conduct, wisdom in educating students, diligence and innovation, care and dedication, and a broad responsibility for cultural transmission^[1]. The concept soon moved from an address to teachers into formal arrangements for teacher development. The 2024 *Opinions on Promoting Educator Spirit and*

Strengthening the High-quality Professional Teacher Workforce requires Educator Spirit to be incorporated into teacher preparation and development, teacher-education curricula, classroom teaching, social practice, standards, management, and evaluation ^[2]. Its relevance to teacher education is therefore direct. Student-teachers encounter these expectations while they are still learning what teaching involves and what kind of teacher they wish to become.

This development also meets an existing requirement within Chinese higher education. The *2020 Guidelines for Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education* places value education across disciplines and asks universities to connect value formation, knowledge learning, and capability development within subject courses ^[3]. In teacher education, the relationship is especially close because a methodology course teaches future teachers both how to teach and how to understand the responsibilities attached to teaching. Earlier policies had already linked teacher preparation with teacher morality, educational practice, subject knowledge, and professional competence. The *Action Plan for Revitalizing Teacher Education (2018–2022)* included teacher-morality development as one of its main actions and called for exemplary teachers and school practice to enter teacher preparation ^[4]. The *2022 New Era Strong Teachers Plan for Basic Education* again required reform of curriculum content and teaching methods in teacher-education institutions and stronger educational practice ^[5]. Educator Spirit brings these concerns together in a more explicit description of good teacherhood.

A curricular problem follows. Broad statements about an ideal teacher do not specify how a student-teacher should respond to a disruptive class, judge a learner's weak performance, select a culturally appropriate text, or decide when different learners need different support. These decisions are where professional values meet teaching practice. If Educator Spirit stays at the level of slogans, quotations, or additional moral content, its relationship with learning to teach remains weak. A teacher-education course has to give student-teachers a way to work with these expectations while learning subject pedagogy.

This paper considers one question: How can Educator Spirit be translated from a broad expectation of teacherhood into pedagogical judgement in a pre-service EFL methodology course? It uses the compulsory course English Language Teaching Methodology as an illustrative curricular case. The course carries two credits and 32 contact hours and covers language learning, teaching approaches, classroom management, the teaching of language skills and systems, moral learning, and assessment. The discussion draws on the course structure and recent national teacher-education policies. No claim is made about measured changes in students' attitudes or behavior. The purpose is to develop a curriculum framework that can later be examined through student work, classroom observation, interviews, or reflective writing.

2. Educator Spirit and professional formation

2.1. From an image of the good teacher to professional identity

Teacher identity provides a useful connection between policy expectations and teacher education. Beijaard *et al.* described professional identity as an ongoing process in which teachers interpret who they are and who they want to become within particular contexts ^[6]. A recent systematic review similarly shows that teacher identity research repeatedly deals with becoming a teacher, context, change, conflict, communities, and subject specialisms ^[7]. For language teachers, identity is also linked with the social settings, practices, and forms of participation through which teachers come to understand their professional position ^[8]. These studies

make the beginning stage of teacher education important because student-teachers are already forming ideas about good teaching before they hold full professional responsibility.

Educator Spirit offers an authorized image of teacherhood within this process. The six formulations in the 2023 letter combine several kinds of expectation. Some concern public purpose, including commitment to the country and a responsibility to educate for wider social goals. Some concern moral character and teacher conduct. Others refer directly to pedagogical work: enlightening minds, attending to individual differences, learning continuously, seeking innovation, and caring for students ^[1]. The 2024 Opinions extend these expectations into teacher education and professional management. It calls for Educator Spirit and teacher morality to run through teacher-education courses and the full process of teacher preparation. The same document identifies disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary competence as a foundation of educating students and calls for stronger teaching capability ^[2]. Moral purpose, professional knowledge, and pedagogical capability consequently appear in the same policy picture.

This combination is relevant to an EFL methodology course. Korthagen's discussion of the good teacher shows why teacher education cannot be reduced to techniques or competencies alone: teachers' beliefs, identity, and sense of mission have consequences for what they do in classrooms ^[9]. Student-teachers therefore need opportunities to relate a public image of the teacher to the smaller decisions through which teaching is carried out. Their use of the underlying commitments becomes visible when a teaching situation leaves more than one reasonable course of action, and they have to explain the decision they make.

2.2. Pedagogical judgment as the point of connection

Professional teaching contains choices that cannot be settled by a teaching technique on its own. Biesta places teacher judgment close to the question of educational purpose: a teacher has to consider what a particular action is for, whom it serves, and what educational consequences it may carry ^[10]. This is particularly visible during initial teacher education. Student-teachers can learn a sequence for a communicative lesson or a set of classroom-management techniques, yet the use of that knowledge still depends on the learners, the task, the classroom situation, and the purpose of the lesson.

Pedagogical judgment therefore provides a practical point of connection for Educator Spirit. Four areas can be drawn from the policy language and from the work of learning to teach.

First, professional purpose asks student-teachers to explain what they think English teaching is for and how individual career plans relate to educational and social responsibility. Second, ethical responsibility concerns fairness, teacher conduct, use of authority, cultural representation, and the consequences that teacher decisions have for students. Third, pedagogical judgment concerns the selection and adjustment of teaching methods in response to learners and contexts. It gives concrete meaning to such policy expressions as educating according to individual differences and seeking innovation. Fourth, relational care concerns how teachers notice learners, listen to them, set expectations, give feedback, and maintain relationships while carrying professional authority. These four areas correspond broadly with the original course design of aspiration, morality, competence, and educational care, while placing each area inside professional activity.

The relationship can be stated as a sequence used in teaching tasks: identify the educational purpose; examine the learners and constraints; choose an action; explain the value and professional knowledge supporting that action; consider its likely consequences; revise where necessary. Reflection then has an object. Student-teachers are reflecting on a decision they made, the grounds on which they made it, and

another course of action that could have been taken. This makes value formation observable in coursework without claiming that a short course can measure a stable moral identity.

3. Working with Educator Spirit in an EFL methodology course

The framework is most useful where an EFL methodology course already contains decisions with ethical and educational consequences. Adding a separate block of political or moral material to every unit can make the connection with subject learning artificial. Three existing parts of English Language Teaching Methodology provide clearer sites: classroom management, assessment, and language-and-culture teaching. Each creates a different problem for the student-teacher and draws on different aspects of Educator Spirit.

3.1. Classroom management: Authority, fairness, and care

Classroom management is often introduced through seating, instructions, grouping, time, discipline, and responses to difficult behavior. For a student-teacher, however, it is also an early encounter with authority. A simple case can make this visible: several lower-secondary students repeatedly talk during a group task; the planned activity is falling behind; warnings have had little effect. Student-teachers can be asked to choose and justify a response. Possible actions include stopping the task, separating students, speaking to them after class, changing the task, introducing a consequence, or seeking help from the class teacher.

The value question emerges from the reasons given for the choice. Maintaining order may protect other students' opportunity to learn. A strong public reprimand may restore pace while embarrassing a learner. Repeated tolerance may appear caring to one student and unfair to the rest of the class. The exercise therefore brings together moral conduct, pedagogical wisdom, and care. It also prevents care from being treated as simple kindness. Caring teaching may include limits, correction, or sanctions when these are proportionate and educationally justified.

The teacher educator can extend the task by changing one feature of the case: the disruptive student has difficulty understanding the instructions; the group task is too easy; the same behavior occurs across lessons; or the student has recently experienced a family problem. Student-teachers then revise their response and explain what changed their judgment. In this form, the policy expectation of teaching in accordance with individual differences becomes a question of evidence and action. Attention to the individual requires the teacher to find out more before deciding what a behavior means.

3.2. Assessment: Achievement, fairness, and learner development

Assessment provides a second site because EFL teachers work with scores while also being responsible for learner development. The methodology course can present a class profile in which students show different levels of grammatical accuracy, oral fluency, participation, and progress. Student-teachers design an assessment plan and then explain what evidence should count, how feedback should be given, and what action follows for learners who do poorly.

This task puts professional competence together with a moral question of fairness. Giving every learner the same task may provide comparability, although identical treatment does not answer every question about need. Differentiated support may improve access while creating concerns about standards. Frequent testing may give teachers visible information about attainment, while excessive testing can narrow classroom attention. Student-teachers have to decide how formative and summative information will be used and how

their plan supports subsequent teaching.

Such a task also gives practical content to the 2024 policy's connection between professional expertise and educating students ^[2]. Competence is shown through the quality of the assessment decision: the alignment between aims and evidence, the interpretation of learner performance, and the next teaching step. The moral dimension is present in how the same decision distributes attention, opportunity, and consequences among learners. Student-teachers can compare two assessment plans and discuss which learners become visible or invisible under each design.

3.3. Language and culture: Representation and public responsibility

EFL teaching carries an additional question because language lessons regularly involve cultural texts, images, examples, and comparisons. The 2020 curriculum guidelines ask higher education courses to contribute to students' cultural confidence and social responsibility ^[3], while Educator Spirit includes a wider cultural and educational responsibility ^[1]. In an EFL methodology course, these expectations can be approached through the selection and teaching of language materials.

A teaching task may ask student-teachers to adapt a textbook unit on festivals, family life, environmental action, local communities, or technological change for a Chinese secondary classroom. They decide which materials to retain, what Chinese experience can be added, and how comparison will be organized. The quality of the work depends on language objectives as well as representation. Simply inserting a Chinese cultural item does not show that students will use English meaningfully or understand either culture more carefully. The student-teacher has to design a language task through which comparison, explanation, or interpretation occurs.

This is a useful place to connect professional purpose with subject knowledge. An English teacher is teaching a language that opens access to people, texts, and viewpoints beyond the immediate community. The same teacher is working with learners who need language to explain their own social and cultural experience. A good task can hold both responsibilities together. For example, students might compare how a shared social issue is discussed in two English-language sources and one local source, examine differences in wording and assumptions, and produce an English explanation for an identified audience. The student-teacher then justifies the source choice, linguistic demand, cultural framing, and likely learning outcome. Public responsibility enters through the design of language learning itself.

4. Implications for curriculum design and evaluation

The three examples suggest several changes to the way Educator Spirit can be handled in a methodology course. The first concerns curriculum alignment. Values need to appear in learning outcomes, tasks, feedback, and assessment if students are expected to use them in professional decisions. A learning outcome such as "explain and justify a classroom-management decision with reference to learner needs, educational purpose, and professional responsibility" is more workable than a general requirement to "understand Educator Spirit." It identifies something that can be taught and reviewed.

The second concerns the relationship between values and subject pedagogy. Teacher education already contains situations in which fairness, care, responsibility, cultural understanding, and professional commitment matter. These situations allow value education to grow from the professional problem under study. The 2024 Opinions support this connection by placing Educator Spirit across teacher-education

curricula, classroom teaching, practice, and teacher development ^[2]. In a methodology course, the teaching case, lesson plan, microteaching episode, or assessment design can therefore carry both professional knowledge and value questions.

The third concerns evaluation. Claims about internalized values require caution. A student may learn the expected vocabulary without using it when making a teaching decision. Conversely, a student may make a careful and responsible decision without repeating policy terms. Course evaluation can therefore focus on evidence that is closer to the learning process: the reasons students give for decisions, their attention to learner differences, the consistency between stated purposes and lesson design, their response to peer or teacher feedback, and the revisions they make after a case changes. These forms of evidence show developing professional judgment. Longer-term claims about identity or conduct would require follow-up during practicum and early career teaching.

The fourth concerns teacher identity. Initial teacher education is a period in which student-teachers move between the position of student and the anticipated position of teacher ^[11]. Professional identity also changes as teachers encounter school culture, pupils, colleagues, policy, and prior personal experience ^[12]. For this reason, a course cannot deliver a fixed teacher identity. It can provide language, cases, standards, and opportunities through which student-teachers examine what a responsible EFL teacher may do. Educator Spirit then becomes one of the public resources available in this process of professional formation.

This framework also clarifies the role of the teacher educator. The teacher educator has to do more than provide an approved answer to each dilemma. Cases are useful because reasonable values can pull a decision in different directions: order and participation, equality and differentiated support, measurable achievement and broader development, cultural confidence and open intercultural inquiry. Discussion can make these considerations explicit while still requiring a final professional choice. Student-teachers learn that professional responsibility includes being able to give reasons for action and reconsider those reasons when the situation changes.

5. Conclusion

Educator Spirit has moved quickly from a description of exemplary teacher qualities into teacher-education policy, curriculum, professional development, management, and evaluation. For pre-service EFL teacher education, the central curriculum question is how this broad image of good teacherhood enters the ordinary work of learning to teach. This paper has proposed four areas—professional purpose, ethical responsibility, pedagogical judgment, and relational care—and used classroom management, assessment, and language-and-culture teaching to show how they can be addressed through existing methodology content.

The proposed framework keeps the connection with the six aspects of Educator Spirit while giving student-teachers a task they can actually perform: make a pedagogical decision, explain its grounds, consider its effects on learners, and revise it when new information appears. It also gives curriculum-based ideological and political education a subject-specific form within EFL teacher preparation. The value of the approach now needs to be examined through student lesson plans, reflective writing, classroom discussion, practicum observation, and follow-up interviews. Such evidence would help establish how student-teachers interpret these expectations and which parts, if any, become durable resources in their developing professional identities.

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