

## **Transformative Teaching: Unveiling the Prophetic Approach to Learner-Centred Education**

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### **Abstract**

Unlike mere information transmission, transformative teaching revolutionizes individuals and society. The Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) instructional methods and divine pedagogy continue to inspire humanity. This study explores his pedagogic techniques, including personalized guidance, cognitive mapping and character development. By examining his approach, this study unfolds the secrets behind his profound impact. The Prophet's learner-centered methodology fostered a transformative model of education, inspiring drastic positive change. He emphasized student-centered instruction, recognizing individual learning uniqueness. Personalized guidance addressed diverse needs and abilities, ensuring comprehension and application. Cognitive mapping connected new knowledge to existing understanding, creating a cohesive framework. Character development cultivated virtues, moral values and emotional intelligence, recognizing their importance for personal growth and societal progress. This study aims to extract and translate the prophetic teaching techniques into actionable insights for modern education. By emphasizing student-centered instruction, personalized guidance, cognitive mapping and character development, this framework offers a powerful approach to teaching that can drive meaningful change. By adopting this approach, education can inspire positive change, foster personal growth and cultivate compassionate individuals contributing to societal betterment.

***Keywords:*** *Transformative Teaching, Learner-Centred Education, Prophetic Approach, Personalized Guidance, Cognitive Mapping, Character Development*

### **Introduction**

Education is a powerful trigger for personal and societal transformation. Nevertheless, today's teaching methods often prioritize information trans-

mission over transformative growth. In contrast, transformative teaching seeks to revolutionize minds, souls and actions, fostering positive change and empowerment. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) exemplifies the ultimate transformative teacher, whose distinctive instructional methods and divine pedagogy continue to inspire humanity. This study explores the Prophet's distinctive teaching techniques, centered on personalized guidance, cognitive mapping and character development, to uncover the secrets behind his profound impact.

The Prophet's learner-centered methodology offers a transformative model of education, emphasizing student-centered instruction, recognizing individual learning uniqueness and cultivating virtues, moral values and emotional intelligence. Transformative education refers to "a process of learning that challenges individuals' existing knowledge, beliefs and values, leading to a fundamental change in their perspectives, attitudes and behaviors" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). This approach to education aims "to empower learners to critically examine their assumptions, develop a more nuanced understanding of themselves and society, and become active agents of change" (Freire, 1970, p. 66). As such, by exploring Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) transformative model of teaching, this study aims to distill valuable insights for modern education, highlighting the importance of 'learner-centered instruction', personalized guidance, cognitive mapping and character development. As educators seek to shape future generations, the Prophet's approach reminds them that education should inspire positive change, foster personal growth and cultivate compassionate and responsible individuals contributing to societal betterment. This research tries to shed light on the prophetic approach to learner-centered education, offering a powerful framework for transformative teaching and learning. The study is qualitative in nature, and the data is collected through reviewing the existing literature and authentic texts of Hadith, i.e., the prophetic traditions.

### **Review of Related Literature**

The concept of transformative teaching has been explored in various educational contexts, with a focus on promoting critical thinking, empathy and personal growth (Mezirow, 1997). In the context of Islamic education, transformative teaching has been linked to the prophetic approach, emphasizing the importance of character development, compassion and social responsibility (Al-Attas, 1979).

Research has shown that teachers who adopt a transformative approach can positively impact student learning outcomes, fostering a deeper un-

derstanding of subject matter and promoting emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). In Islamic education, this approach has been found to enhance students' spiritual growth and moral development (Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, 2017). The Prophet's (PBUH) way of teaching is characterized by various effective methods. He used storytelling to convey moral lessons, making complex concepts more relatable and memorable (Khan, 2018). The Prophet (PBUH) also employed illustrations and metaphors, like clasping his hands to demonstrate unity among believers, to explain abstract ideas in an engaging way (Rahman, 2017). He led by example, demonstrating practices and values in his own life (Siddiqi, 2019), and encouraged questioning and dialogue to foster critical thinking. Emotional connection (Ali, 2015), repetition, and reinforcement (Usmani, 2014) were also key aspects of his teaching style, as he tailored his approach to suit different learning styles and audiences (Hassan, 2013). Furthermore, the Prophet (PBUH) prompted self-reflection and introspection, helping learners connect new knowledge with their own experiences (Qasmi, 2012). These methods, among others, contributed to the Prophet's (PBUH) effectiveness as a teacher and leader, and continue to inspire educators and learners today.

The prophetic approach to teaching emphasizes the importance of role-modeling as well, with teachers serving as exemplars of moral character and compassion. This approach has been found to promote a positive learning environment, encouraging student engagement and motivation (Hattie, 2009). The literature suggests that transformative teaching, informed by the prophetic approach, can have a profound impact on student learning and personal growth. By adopting this approach, educators can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that fosters critical thinking, empathy, and spiritual growth.

### **Prophetic Approach to Learner-centered Education:**

Learner-centered education: Learner-centered education is an “approach to education that focuses on the learner’s needs, interests, and abilities and which emphasizes the learner’s active role in the learning process” (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p. 9).

Learner-centered education is “an educational approach that prioritizes the learner’s autonomy, agency and identity, and which seeks to create a learning environment that is inclusive, supportive and challenging” (Hmelo-Silver, 2004, p. 236).

As noted by McCombs and Whisler (1997), learner-centered education focuses on the learner's needs and abilities, recognizing that each individual brings unique experiences, perspectives, and learning styles to the educational setting. This approach prioritizes the learner's active role in the learning process, encouraging them to take ownership of their learning and develop a sense of agency. Similarly, Hmelo-Silver (2004) emphasized the importance of prioritizing learner autonomy and agency, suggesting that learner-centered education should seek to create a learning environment that is inclusive, supportive, and challenging. By acknowledging and valuing the learner's voice and experience, learner-centered education aims to foster a deeper sense of engagement, motivation, and overall academic success.

Taking the above two definitions of the learner-centered education into consideration, it can be derived that Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) teaching methods were learner-centered in many ways.

Here are some examples:

**1. Personalized Guidance/Attention:** He gave individualized attention to his disciples, recognizing their unique strengths, weaknesses and learning styles. The following examples from Hadith illustrate the Prophet's personalized attention to his students:

*Ibn Abbas's curiosity:* The Prophet (PBUH) noticed his cousin Ibn Abbas's curiosity and love for learning, so he took him under his wing and taught him extensively; and prayed for him to be granted wisdom. Narrated by Ibn Abbas: The prophet (PBUH) hugged me to his chest and said "O Allah, teach him wisdom, Hikmah" (Sahih Bukhari, Number 3546).

*Abu Hurairah's forgetfulness:* Abu Huraira reported: I said, "O Messenger of Allah, I hear many traditions from you, but I forget them." The Prophet said, "Spread open your garment." I spread it and he placed something from his hand into it, saying, "Wrap it." I wrapped it around me, and then I never forgot a tradition ever again. (Sahih Bukhari, Number 3648). This Hadith reveals the Prophet's personal attention to Abu Hurairah's learning and memory. Abu Hurairah, a devoted disciple, expressed his concern about forgetting the teachings he received from the Prophet. The Prophet, sensing his concern, offered a unique solution. By placing something from his hand into Abu Hurairah's garment and instructing him to wrap it around himself, the Prophet performed a symbolic act of blessing and empowerment. This gesture can be seen as a manifestation of the Prophet's compassion and willingness to help his disciple overcome his limitations.

*Aisha's numerous questions: The Prophet (PBUH) patiently answered Aisha's numerous questions, demonstrating his encouragement of her seeking knowledge.*

*Advice to Jariyah Bin Qudama:* Narrated Abu Huraira: A man said to the prophet (PBUH): "Advise me!" The Prophet said, "Do not get angry." The man asked (the same) again and again, and the Prophet said in each case, "Do not get angry." (Sahih al-Bukhari 6116) The man in the Hadith is said to be Jariah Bin Qudama. Another narrator said: The questioner might have had a quick temper, so the Prophet who tailored his advice to each individual's needs, specifically counseled him to avoid anger. (Fath al-Bari, Volume: 10, p.599)

**2. Storytelling:** The Prophet (PBUH) would often share engaging stories about previous prophets, their nations and individuals to teach valuable lessons to his companions. Telling stories is an effective way of grabbing attention, engaging the audience while imparting the lessons in a more relatable and practical way.

For instance, The Prophet ﷺ said "*A man felt very thirsty while he was on the way; he came across a well. He went down the well, quenched his thirst and came out. Meanwhile he saw a dog panting and licking mud because of excessive thirst. He said to himself, 'This dog is suffering from thirst as I did.'* So, he went down the well again and filled his shoe with water and watered it. Allah was pleased with him for that deed and forgave him." (Bukhari, Number 2466). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) imparted the lesson of being kind with animals through the story of the man. (Maryam Ansar, 2022)

**3. Brainstorming and Interactive Discussion:** Brainstorming is a powerful technique for innovative problem-solving, generating new ideas, stimulating thinking and fostering creativity. It is a collaborative problem-solving approach that encourages individuals to share their thoughts and ideas freely, without fear of criticism or evaluation, to generate a vast array of creative solutions (De Bono, 1985). During brainstorming, a teacher presents a problem or question to stimulate thinking, and encourage to share ideas freely, without fear of judgment or criticism facilitating a free-flowing discussion.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) effectively employed brainstorming when he posed an open-ended question to his followers: Narrated Ibn 'Umar: Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "*Amongst the trees, there is a*

*tree, the leaves of which do not fall and is like a Muslim. Tell me the name of that tree.*” Everybody started thinking about the trees of the desert areas. And I thought of the date-palm tree but felt shy to answer. The others then asked, “*What is that tree, O Allah’s Messenger (PBUH)?*” He replied, “*It is the date-palm tree*”. By asking this question in a plural form, the Prophet encouraged collective thinking and discussion, allowing the group to share ideas and insights without feeling embarrassed or singled out (Siddiqui, 2008). It was after a thoughtful pause the Prophet provided the answer: “*The palm tree.*” This approach not only promoted collaborative learning but also demonstrated the Prophet’s innovative teaching methods, which continue to inspire and guide us today.

Another example of the Prophet’s (PBUH) brainstorming technique can be seen in the story of the digging of the trench during the Battle of the Trench (Ghazwa Khandaq). The Prophet (peace be upon him) gathered his companions, including Salman al-Farisi, a Persian convert, to discuss the threat of the approaching enemy army. He suggested digging a trench around Medina to protect the city, which was a novel idea for the Arabs. Salman said: O Messenger of Allah, we were in Persia, when we were besieged, we would dig a trench around ourselves” (Fath Al Bari, Volume 07: p 451). The Prophet (peace be upon him) consulted with his companions, considering their input and ideas.

This example demonstrates the Prophet’s (PBUH) willingness to:

- 1. Encourage participation and idea-sharing**
- 2. Consider innovative solutions from others (Salman al Farisi’s suggestion)**
- 3. Collaborate with his companions to achieve a common goal**

By embracing Salman’s idea, the Prophet (PBUH) showed his openness to others’ perspectives and his ability to build on the strengths of his team. This brainstorming session ultimately led to a successful defense strategy, as the trench prevented the enemy from entering Medina. The Prophet’s companion Abu Huraira once certified: “I have not seen anyone who consults his companions more than the Prophet (peace be upon him)” (Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, Number 1714). This statement highlights the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) collaborative approach to decision-making and his willingness to seek input and advice from his companions.

**4. Teaching by Doing:** Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used practical demonstrations and hands-on experiences to teach important skills and values. Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) applied teaching by practice when he saw a boy who was skinning a sheep and said to him: “Let me teach

you.” He put his hand between the skin and the meat until he reached up to the armpit of the sheep, and then he said: “Skin it like that, young man!” (Abu Dawud, Taharat, 73). The practical classes provide students with the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to a practical task and thus promote a higher level of cognitive processing. The scientific method to train students is to associate the laboratory classes with lectures (Mohamed, 2021, pp. 49-52).

**5. Adapting to learners’ needs:** He adjusted his teaching methods to meet the needs of his students, including using visual aids and simple language and by giving suitable answers to

### **Cognitive Mapping through Analogies and Illustrations:**

Cognitive maps can be defined as mental images and concepts that are built to visualize and assimilate information. They act as tools for strategists to move beyond the constraints of short-term memory and to process information spanning long periods of time (Sammot-Bonnicci & McGee, 2015). Cognitive mapping refers to the mental processes that help individuals organize, understand and connect new information to existing knowledge, creating a mental representation or ‘map’ of relationships, between ideas, concepts and experiences. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used analogies and illustrations to facilitate cognitive mapping, making complex concepts more accessible and memorable.

Abu Hurairah narrated: I heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) saying, *“If there were a river at the door of one of you in which he takes a bath five times a day, would any soiling remain on him?”* They replied, *“No soiling would be left on him. He (PBUH) said: That is the five obligatory Salat (prayers). Allah obliterates all sins as a result of performing them.”* - Al Bukhari & Muslim (Riyad Us-Salihin, Chapter 187, Number 1042) In this Hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) uses an analogy to illustrate the purifying effect of the five daily prayers. He compares the prayers to a river that cleanses the body, asking: By using this analogy, the Prophet (PBUH) effectively conveys the importance and power of prayer in purifying the soul, making it easier for his audience to understand and remember.

Nu'man bin Bashir reported: Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: *“The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever.”* (Bukhari, Number 6011; Muslim, Number 258). The Prophet’s analogy of the believers as a single body powerfully conveys the idea of unity, empathy and mutual support among the believers,

emphasizing that the suffering of one individual affects the entire community. The analogy invites listeners to reflect on their own relationships and responsibilities within the community. Through this, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) effectively communicates a valuable lesson, making it more relatable, memorable and impactful.

Here is another Hadith narrated by Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari reported: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *“The believer who recites the Qur'an is like a citron whose fragrance is sweet and whose taste is delicious. A believer who does not recite the Qur'an is like a date-fruit which has no fragrance but has a sweet taste. The hypocrite who recites the Qur'an is like basil whose fragrance is so sweet, but its taste is bitter. The hypocrite who does not recite the Qur'an is like a colocynth which has no fragrance and its taste is bitter.”* (Riyad Us-Salihin, 995). Here, the Prophet (PBUH) uses a fruit analogy to describe four types of people: believers who recite the Qur'an (sweet and fragrant citron), believers who don't (sweet but fragrance-less date-fruit), hypocrites who recite (fragrant but bitter basil), and hypocrites who don't (bitter and fragrance-less colocynth). This analogy beautifully depicts the importance of genuine faith, spiritual growth and sincerity in one's relationship with the Qur'an.

The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“A believer to another believer is like a building whose different parts enforce each other. The Prophet (PBUH) then clasped his hands with the fingers interlaced (while saying that).”* (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2446). This hadith emphasizes the importance of unity, solidarity and mutual support among the believers, and encourages them to work together to build a strong and harmonious community. By clasping his hands with fingers interlaced, the Prophet (PBUH) is illustrating this concept visually. Just as the fingers are intertwined and dependent on each other for support, the believers should be similarly connected and supportive of one another.

### **Prophetic Approach to Character Development:**

Character development was a crucial element of the Prophet's transformative teaching. He focused on cultivating virtues, moral values, and emotional intelligence in his companions, recognizing that these qualities are essential for personal growth and societal progress. By emphasizing character development, the Prophet created a community of individuals who embodied the teachings and became role models for future generations. Good character is an intrinsic (inner) motivation to do what is right and good by commendable standards of behavior in every situation. Character is related to a person's overall appearance and interactions with

those around him. Thus, character includes moral values with commendable ethics, attitudes, and behavior. A person is considered to have a good and correct character, reflected in the right attitudes and actions following applicable norms. Therefore, a character will be manifested or seen from a person's daily habits, attitudes and behavior.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the importance of cultivating excellent moral character through his teaching and personal example. In the Quran, the term *khuluq* denotes the concept of character. In one notable verse, it is stated: *“And you, (Muhammad), are on an exalted standard of character”* (68:4). The Prophet's selection for prophethood was not based on his community affiliation, but rather his exceptional qualities, such as truthfulness, trustworthiness and gentleness, which were even acknowledged by his adversaries. (Irfan ul, 2021).

The Prophet further emphasized the importance of good character, saying: *“Nothing is heavier on the scale of deeds than good character.”* (Al-Tirmidhi, Number 2002). He declared: *“I was sent to perfect good character.”* (Musnad Ahmad, Number 8952). His methodology for character development was comprehensive and multi-faceted, focusing on instilling excellent moral character through:

### **1. Leading by example:**

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) practiced what he preached. Before he received the honour of prophethood, he was known among the people of Makkah as *“As-Sadiq Al-Amin,”* the most honest and trustworthy person. He kept this character throughout his life. He never broke a pledge or promise. Even his enemies could not accuse him of being dishonest (Ibn Hisham, 1:246). He followed and lived the Qur'an at every moment in every detail of his life. It is reported in a hadith: Sa'd ibn Hisham said that he asked Aishah: *“Tell me about the character of the Prophet (PBUH). She said, “His character was the Qur'an”* (Musnad Ahmad, Number 25813).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) would often help with household chores, such as milking goats and mending shoes, to set an example for his companions. *Aishah was asked, did the Prophet (PBUH) used to carry out any work in his house? She said, ‘Yes, the Messenger of Allah □ used to mend his sandal, patch his garment and work in his house, just like anyone of you works in his house.’* (Musnad Ahmad, Number 25341, al-Adab al Mufrad, 530)

He would pray for extended periods at night, demonstrating his devotion

to Allah and encouraging his companions to do the same. Aisha narrated: Aishah (May Allah be pleased said: *The Prophet (PBUH) would stand (in prayer) so long that the skin of his feet would crack. I asked him, "Why do you do this while your past and future sins have been forgiven?" He said, "Should I not be a grateful slave of Allah?"* (Riyad us-Salihin, 98)

## **2. Practical training:**

The Prophet (PBUH) advised his companion Abu Dharr to cultivate seven key characteristics that shape a person into a noble individual with exemplary character. Abu Dharr said: *"My close friend, the Prophet (PBUH), advised me with seven things: To maintain ties with my relatives, even if they cut me off; to love the poor and be close to them; not to fear anyone's criticism when it comes to Allah's matters; to look at those who are inferior to me (in wealth or status) and not look at those who are superior to me; to speak the truth, even if it's bitter; to frequently say: 'There is no power or strength except with Allah'."* (Ithaaf, p. 415)

Abu Hurairah reported: Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, *"While a man was walking on his way, he became extremely thirsty. He found a well, he went down into it to drink water. Upon leaving it, he saw a dog which was panting out of thirst. His tongue was lolling out and he was eating moist earth from extreme thirst. The man thought to himself: 'This dog is extremely thirsty as I was.' So, he descended into the well, filled up his leather sock with water; and holding it in his teeth, climbed up and quenched the thirst of the dog. Allah appreciated his action and forgave his sins". The Companions asked: "Shall we be rewarded for showing kindness to the animals also?" He (ﷺ) said, "A reward is given in connection with every living creature" - Al Bukhari and Muslim. (Riyad us-Salihin)*

The Prophet (PBUH) shared a real-life scenario, making it relatable and applicable to everyday life. By asking, *"Shall we be rewarded for showing kindness to animals also?"* the companions were encouraged to think critically and apply the lesson to their own lives. The Prophet's (PBUH) response, *"A reward is given in connection with every living creature,"* delineated the importance of compassion and kindness, making it a practical lesson for his companions to implement.

## **3. Providing opportunities for growth:**

The Prophet Muhammad empowered his companions, including Bilal, a former black slave from present-day Ethiopia, to reach their full potential by providing opportunities for growth and development. Despite facing immense hardships, including torture, starvation and persecution, Bilal

was among the first to embrace Islam. The Prophet recognized Bilal's potential and nurtured his talents, later appointing him as the first muezzin in Medina, where his powerful and melodious voice could call believers to prayer. (Nuri, 2020)

Another notable example is the appointment of the young Mus'ab Ibn Umayr as the Prophet's (PBUH) ambassador to Yathrib (Madina). Mus'ab was tasked with teaching a small group of believers who had pledged allegiance to Islam and preparing the city for the eventual migration (Hijrah) of the Prophet and his companions. (Hamid, 1994).

#### **4. Correcting mistakes:**

A supportive and non-punitive teacher-student relationship is crucial for students' social, emotional, and academic development. Research suggests that teachers' patience, empathy and constructive feedback foster a positive learning environment, encouraging students to take risks and learn from them (Hattie, 2009; Marzano, 2007). In contrast, excessive criticism and admonishment can only lead to decreased motivation, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem (Kohn, 2006).

Anas ibn Malik was a young boy when he had the honour of serving the Prophet (PBUH). It is narrated from him that during his ten years of service, the Prophet (PBUH) never said a word of impatience or rebuked him. Narrated by Anas himself: *"I served the Prophet (PBUH) for ten years, and he never said to me, 'Uff' (a minor harsh word denoting impatience) and never blamed me by saying, 'Why did you do so or why didn't you do so?'"* (Sahih al-Bukhari, 6038).

Educators can derive from this narration the importance of patience and gentle guidance when dealing with students, who are naturally prone to mistakes. By emulating the Prophet's (PBUH) approach, they can create a nurturing environment that encourages growth, learning and development.

On another occasion, Anas ibn Malik said, *"Whilst we were in the mosque with the Messenger of Allah SAW, a Bedouin came and started urinating in the mosque. The Companions said, 'Stop it! Stop it!' But, the Messenger of Allah SAW said, 'Do not interrupt him; leave him alone.'" So, they left him until he had finished urinating, then the Messenger of Allah SAW called him and said to him, "In these mosques, it is not right to do anything like urinating or defecating; they are only for remembering Allah, praying and reading Qur'an, or words to that effect."* Then he command-

*ed a man who was there to bring a bucket of water and throw it over the (urine), and he did so.” (Muslim, Number 285)*

The Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) gentle correction of the Bedouin’s mistake exemplified his exceptional character and teaching methods, showing patience, empathy and wisdom by avoiding embarrassment, creating a safe learning space, demonstrating understanding, educating rather than punishing and showing respect and kindness, thereby setting a noble example for his companions and illustrating the power of compassionate guidance in fostering personal growth and character development.

Abu Mas’ud al-Ansari said, *“I was beating a servant of mine when I heard someone saying from behind me, ‘Listen, Abu Mas’ud, listen, Abu Mas’ud.’ I turned around and saw that it was the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He said, ‘Allah has more power over you than you have over him.’ ... I never beat any servants of mine after that.” (Al-Tirmidhi, Number 1948)*

The Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) character-building approach is evident here, where he compassionately intervened to stop a mistake and guided his companion towards empathy and self-control. This shows how the Prophet helped his friends and followers correct their mistakes and become better people by teaching them to be kind and gentle.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) way of teaching has valuable lessons for educators. He used storytelling, analogies, examples and simple language to make complex ideas easy to understand. He also emphasized the importance of building strong relationships with learners, repeating and reinforcing key concepts, encouraging questions and discussions and adapting the teaching style catering to the needs of different learners. The Prophetic model of teaching offers a powerful framework for modern educators, emphasizing student-centered instruction, personalized guidance, cognitive mapping, and character development, to create an effective and adaptable learning environment. The study also highlights the importance of emotional intelligence, empathy and compassion in teaching. By incorporating the Prophetic teaching methods into their practice, educators can create a more engaging, inclusive and effective learning environment. In conclusion, the Prophetic way of teaching offers a transformative approach to education, emphasizing emotional connection, critical thinking and adaptability. The Prophet’s teaching methods are still a great example for educators today, providing valuable insights on how to teach and learn effectively.

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