

Qingjian Zhao, 2023

Volume 7 Issue 1, pp. 25-37

Received: 20<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Revised: 09<sup>th</sup> February 2023, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2023

Accepted: 18<sup>th</sup> February 2023

Date of Publication: 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023

DOI- <https://doi.org/10.20319/pijtel.2023.71.2537>

This paper can be cited as: Zhao, Q. (2023). "Higher, Faster, Stronger": Championing Classroom Teaching. PUPIL: International Journal of Teaching, Education and Learning, 7(1), 25-37.

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## **“HIGHER, FASTER, STRONGER”: CHAMPIONING CLASSROOM TEACHING**

**Qingjian Zhao**

Graduate School, Emilio Aguinaldo, Manila, Philippines

[qingjian.zhao.mnl@eac.edu.ph](mailto:qingjian.zhao.mnl@eac.edu.ph)

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### **Abstract**

*This qualitative narrative-autoethnography research explores my journey as a Wushu Athlete into becoming a teacher. My research intended to cull my life stories and experiences to elucidate my attitude, approaches, and visions as a teacher. My personal stories were drawn from my personal accounts of becoming a Wushu Olympic champion and the journey that led me into the noblest profession of all. Given the opportunity to teach Wushu at a prestigious university, I am privileged to utilize my techniques and skills and share them with my students. My idea is to shape my ideologies in teaching based on my athletic journey. Through this narrative, I discovered that my experiences placed me in good stead as an effective classroom teacher. While I realized the importance of theoretical foundation and practical knowledge in teaching Wushu, I must emphasize that teaching is also about creating relationships and instilling the right attitude among students.*

### **Keywords**

Wushu, Classroom Strategies, Narratives, Teacher-Athlete

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## 1. Introduction

Stories are powerful. It can be utilized to educate others and provide substantial accounts worthy of telling. Autoethnographic showcases my “*life*” (Neyman, 2011). As a researcher, I believe that when we give people voices where they share their life stories others would benefit from it. A narrative inquiry centers on this type of methodology which highlights “*life story interviews, oral histories, photo voice projects, biography, autoethnography, or other human experience*” (Ford, 2020). The autobiography of the informant helps in forming significant lessons learned as he traverses toward his mission of becoming an educator. Contained within this study are stories of my simple beginnings as a successful Martial Arts professional and the obstacles I encountered and my triumphs and tribulations in the field which helped me draw inspiration and motivation of becoming a teacher.

The Chinese government is known for its unique and magnificent cultural inheritance. Martial Arts also known as *Shaolin Kungfu* is an embodiment of this physical and artistic culture that dates to the Xia Dynasty around 4000 years ago. Its distinct training methods, principles, and approaches make it prominent around the world. Many experts regard it as a work of art that requires a certain mindset, training, and skills. Moreover, its purpose goes beyond self-cultivation as many people commit to this practice for the purpose of serving the country. Students commit themselves to a life of persistent training and require a mouthful of patience and determination to master the skill. The core foundation consists of the main stances and footwork, leaps, fist, and foot attack/defense techniques, as well as essential stretching and physical preparation. (Nešković, 2020; Wang & Liu, 2018)

In the past years, Martial Arts caught the attention of researchers from a wide range of academic disciplines, including psychology, kinesiology, sociology, education, and health (de Aguiar, 2018). Most research is geared toward understanding and exploring the experiences of athletes and their motivation to reach their goals.

With the kind of training and discipline ingrained among Martial Arts athletes, the researcher assumes that extensive experience in the field gives a teacher-athlete a unique opportunity to incorporate a distinct style, strategies, and method in the teaching-learning process. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to immerse these methods by exploring my personal journey toward becoming a teacher. Putting this in mind, my central focus is to elucidate my

techniques and methods which are culled from my extensive and rigorous experience as a successful athlete.

### **1.1. Statement of Purpose**

This research utilized the stories of a Wushu athlete and his significant experiences in the field as an athlete and in the classroom as a Martial Arts teacher and coach. Therefore, this paper explored personal accounts and his stories of triumphs and tribulations that led him to where he is right now, a teacher and coach. Moreover, culling from his life story, it sought to describe his methods, traits, and visions as an educator.

With this, the research used the following research questions:

1. What is the respondent's narrative about his life as an athlete?
2. What experiences directed the respondent to understand the importance of his background to his profession as a teacher?
3. How did the informant make use of his experience as an athlete in the classroom?

## **2. Literature Review**

This section covers an extensive review of literature and studies pertaining to the topic. The research utilized these as a way to explain the thoughts and ideas of the main informant.

### **2.1. Martial Arts**

Martial arts education in China dates to the Shang and Zhou dynasties, and it included a significant component—shooting, which is part of the martial arts. During the Zhou Dynasty, it was highlighted as a form of arts and ceremony that was enunciated with the development of the “six arts.” In 1911, with the development of nationalistic ideology, it was incorporated into Physical Education across the high school level and elementary level in 1961. (Wang & Liu, 2018)

It is believed that Physical Education in the form of Martial Arts improves that quality of life. The incorporation of Asian martial arts in physical education might be viewed as an opportunity to learn about the various possibilities available to people who want to pursue martial arts as a pastime (Theeboom, 1999). On the other hand, the University Martial Arts education model goes above and beyond basic martial arts education. It is emphasized that this kind of education can enable pupils to improve their behavior and keep a healthy mind and body to help them go through these challenges. (Huang, 2019)

Taningco Academy of Martial Arts (TAMA) established the 7 teaching approaches of Martial Arts. These are: “1. goal of teaching; 2. opening and closing ritual; 3. ability groups; 4.) sparring, 5.) use of traditional or efficient techniques; 6.) teaching techniques by an analytical of a global method; and 7. response to inappropriate behavior during training (Overton, 2017).”

## **2.2. Wushu Education**

According to Shugen (2020), the "morality-based" cultivation education that adheres to the ancient virtues of "*benevolence, righteousness, propriety, faith, wisdom, filial piety, and loyalty*" is what wushu education in schools is all about. Through its comprehensive exercise program, martial arts also focus on developing students' healthy personalities, firm beliefs, and self-improvement spirit in addition to their physical fitness. Wushu is a martial art that has a structured theory and meaningful attacking and defensive impacts.

Shugen (2020) adds that Wushu instruction in schools is also a component of formal education, which has several educational benefits. The Wushu idea of martial arts can encourage students' sense of competitiveness while also offering students' adolescent combat instincts an appropriate catharsis and release space.

China has always been referred to as the "state of etiquette," as it promotes the culture and has good traditions in the field. The traditional Chinese Wushu culture places a strong emphasis on cultivating both internal and outward skills as well as a balance of toughness and gentleness. Wushu practitioners ought to be polite even though they are not overly detail-oriented and open-minded (Shugen, 2020).

## **2.3. Experience of Teachers Teaching Wushu**

Wushu, a traditional sport with a lengthy history, a comprehensive training program, and a systematic theory of martial arts, has grown to be a significant component of physical education in schools and has a special place in the educational process. Wushu is intimately tied to moral education in China since it exhibits elements of traditional Chinese ideology and culture. Therefore, in order to advance both school Wushu education and moral education, it is crucial to view the school Wushu education plan from the standpoint of moral education, as well as to comprehend fully and unearth the moral values that are embedded within it (Shugen, 2020).

Bai (2017) notes that in martial arts teaching relevant experiences were combined with Chinese martial arts teaching in Shanghai, which was a demonstration of Chinese martial arts

teaching at a relatively advanced level. Students' self-learning was emphasized, students were used as teaching centers, and the emphasis was on developing students' capacity.

#### **2.4. Athlete-to-Teacher Experience**

According to Cho et al. (2018), former athletes' school-life adaptation subfactors were influenced by exercise values (general, moral, and status) and subfactors (school activities, teachers, rules, and academic activities). More specifically, all the subfactors were influenced by general and moral values.

The latter part of Cho's (2018) study suggests that sports instruction can increase academic performance and learning, encourage the sociability required for school life, and foster the collaboration, camaraderie, and school affection required for organizational life. Furthermore, it is anticipated that participating in healthy physical activities will help adolescents adjust to school life by inspiring confidence, cooperation, a spirit of service, and sociability; additionally, the adolescents will be able to experience pleasure, emotional purification, and a sense of accomplishment through their participation in these activities.

### **3. Methods**

This paper is an auto-ethnographic narrative research that was developed by Humphreys (2005). Neyman & Andersen (2011) presented their auto-ethnographic research in "vignettes" of personal stories which reflected their perception of how to become an effective teacher. Hence, I anchored my approach using my personal vignettes and my self-published autobiography as data sources. I used this approach to provide a deeper understanding of my perspective as a successful athlete-teacher. Taking that in mind, the researcher purposefully chose myself as an informant based on my: 1.) experiences as a Martial Arts teacher; 2.) 5 years of teaching experience in a university and Excellent performance rating as per administrative record; 3.) unquestionable record and reputation in his field of martial arts. These were deemed important to make meaningful and rigorous discussions and analyses.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

This section contains the informant's profile, vignettes, and reflections of the researcher. The reflection presents a sequential analysis of the data based on the research questions posted.

Thus, it is expected that the study highlighted the most important information and focus on the delivery of meaningful ideas to bring about better perspectives for the readers.

#### **4.1. Informant's Profile**

I am a well-known Wushu Olympic Champion and an active member and officer of reputable Wushu organizations in China and other countries. I regularly visit other countries as a resource speaker, judge, trainer, teacher, coach, and guest lecturer, and represented my country to influence young people and enthusiasts to venture into Martial Arts. I also served as a leader to create a Center of Wushu Internship somewhere in the West and mentored students attending this internship program. Over the years, I actively promoted Wushu culture, combining the artistic natures of the West and East as well as the Olympic spirit of "*higher, faster, stronger*". I have always strived to share the amazing traditional cultures of China and will continue to do that as my life's work.

#### **4.2. Vignette 1: "Shaolin Temple"**

*I was born in March 1978 in a historical village called Shandong. I grew up watching "Shaolin Temple" starring Jet Li. "Are those flying men flying over the rooftops and leaping over the walls? Is it real? I would ask. I began imagining myself flying over the roofs and walls and running through the water, fully clothed in Hanfu. The idea of the boy being trained in the movie "18 Bronze Men" thrilled me. I never stopped thinking. As I pondered, his feelings grew deeper and deeper which sometimes brought me to visions and fantasies of what I envisioned myself to turn into. As a child, I became extremely bound to Martial Arts. I remember, I must have watched that movie a thousand times. I imagine myself to be the main character practicing at the Thousand Buddhas Hall. Every day, dreaming of being on the same scene practicing the power of boxing and putting harmony to my actions as I felt the breeze on my face. I could vividly recall the sunken floor tiles caused arduous practices and countless leaps and jump. I told myself, "I would not stop until I master real Kungfu."*

#### **4.3. Vignette 2: Learning from the Master**

*At age 5, I was sent by my parents to study Wushu in Dongpin with the hope that physical training would help me in improving my health. You see, I was quite sick when I was a child. I was given an opportunity to study at Shaolin Temple. It was not easy in the beginning. I had to wake up as early as 5 in the morning and start a full day's practice. At first, I couldn't adjust to the lifestyle. It was boring. Despite the toughness of the training, deep down, I was determined to*

*excel. In no time, I adjusted to life in the temple and started to enjoy my stay there. My efforts paid off and earned recognition from my mentors and I was sent to the provincial team to train even harder.*

*Within a confined training center, I had to navigate through studies and life in general. I learned to socialize and interact with the other trainees. This is where I met my first coach. He was very kind. He took care of me and encouraged me to do well. He took me under his care.*

*One time, I set my heart to be selected as the representative of a Wushu provincial competition. I was overly ambitious. So, I trained very hard solo until very late at night. My coach could stop me from it. I was stubborn. I didn't listen to anyone. I only listened to the voice inside my head telling me to keep going. The next day, my whole body ached. I injured myself. I was so devastated. I took a stern scolding from my coach and lost the opportunity to represent the team.*

*I took this as a lesson. I started to listen to my coach. I became more systematic and learned to do things in moderation. It is important to allow your body to recover and rest. I took every lesson by heart. But I never stopped aiming for excellence. As a result, I won the National Championship.*

#### **4.4. Vignette 3: The Road to Success**

*“According to a Chinese proverb, one who excels in academics and Martial Arts is an outstanding student.” My academic journey began when he decided to study at a university and joined their Wushu team. My 4 years were dedicated solely to knowledge-building and National competitions. I became a rising star in a very short time. “I worked hard for it. I was focused on achieving my goals. My dedication and hard work earned me a ticket to the Beijing Olympic Competition. I was prepared to show the world the real spirit of Wushu. At the age of 30, I was considered a veteran in Wushu. “You must understand that at this age, you get exhausted easily. During training, I was physically and mentally exhausted. My diet, rest, and strength were scientifically managed. I improved tremendously.”*

*“I can still remember the day of the competition as if it were yesterday.” That was the year when Chinese Wushu was shown to the world. I showed the charisma of the sport. I captured the hearts of the judges and audience who witnessed my spectacular performance and showmanship. I received the first gold medal with pride knowing that I represented my country with honor.*

#### **4.5. Vignette 4: Higher, Faster, Stronger: A Champion in the Classroom**

*I knew this day would come. Since I won the 2008 Olympic Wushu Championship, everyone suggested that it would be better for me to stay in the professional team to be a Wushu teacher. But, at that time I did not want to be a professional team teacher. I thought university was a better choice. With students from all over the world having different cultural backgrounds, I want to tell them my personal experience and wushu experience. In addition, through the students I teach, I let more people understand Wushu and Chinese culture. Teaching and sharing my skills with young athletes are what I hoped for. This opportunity gives me a chance to serve my country and offer my skills to zealous learners of Martial Arts. I think that this sport represents our culture and upholds our heritage. A year after my big win, I found myself within the confines of a school as a teacher.*

*I can recall my first class with a fondness for how it all began. During that class, I discovered that there is a big gap between the students in the professional team and the students in the semi-major. It is important to build on the foundation of students using theories and concepts. To embrace my role as a teacher, I had to revisit and recall basic theories to prepare the students for practical application and practice of the skill. Like any other teacher, I spent hours preparing his lessons to prepare himself for class the next day. I don't think it is difficult. First, Wushu has brought me a lot of spirits, such as the spirit of hard work, perseverance, and courage. Secondly, I am very confident in my major, and I have tried my best to infect and motivate students. I also enjoy this process very much.*

*I have always believed that I can be a successful teacher. First, I am relatively well-known in the field of Wushu, and everyone knows me. Secondly, the students adore me very much. They will listen to my class very carefully despite the fact that the training is very hard. Finally, because I have a deep understanding of Wushu technology, the knowledge I impart is easy for students to understand. I am relatively close to them. I think that in terms of communication and student management, I am successful because they like my class style.*

*Being well-known in the field has its perks and I used it to my advantage. Combining my experience with my teaching method creates a remarkable training effect. This spell out the difference between my method and that of other teachers. An athlete's natural strength is technique. Classroom demonstration is one of the most effective styles in teaching Martial Arts. I regard my students as their own children. No matter how busy I am, I will patiently guide students to find problems and help them solve them. I know that being a professional martial arts athlete is*



very tiring, so in teaching. I am inclined to combine my lessons with sports experience so that students can experience the fun in a boring class.

My main strategy in the classroom starts by instilling a sense of responsibility among my students. Small things count. I emphasize that this can be done at home like cleaning their rooms and helping their parents with household chores. I believe in the sense of obligation. Responsibility and mission go together. In fact, I believe that a man of responsibility is a man of mission. Creating a good relationship with his student was one of my approaches. Teachers and students are also teachers and friends." Teachers and students do not only have a teacher-apprentice relationship, but also a friendly relationship. These two ideas are the reasons why I want to be a teacher.

I use my teaching experience to promote the Wushu spirit to the world. I think it is very effective. Students can intuitively feel the teacher's style and charm. By imitating the teacher's actions, students can mobilize their emotions and make them actively participate in activities. As an athlete, the training method is more to improve one's skills and satisfy oneself. My teaching method is to satisfy the needs of the students and make them learn more knowledge. I believe that for students to learn this skill they must be exposed to real-life scenarios. I encourage my students to join competitions and organize training in various parts of the world.

"One day, you will become a Master, a real formidable master." This is how I inspire my students to do better in their classes. Endurance and perseverance are key factors in becoming a successful athlete, teacher, and coach. I am a persistent teacher. In fact, students who performed well in his class went to the United States as exchange students. The program motivated many students to join his classes. During their experience, students improved their skills in Wushu and the English language. Hence, serving two purposes simultaneously.

I also served as a leader to create a center in the US and mentored students attending this internship program. I have also mentored students at the Capital Institute of Physical Education to exchange and perform many times. I represented the Confucius Institute, teaching and performing in many European countries. Over the years, I have actively promoted Wushu culture, combining the artistic natures of the West and East as well as the Olympic spirit of "higher, faster, stronger." I have always strived to share the amazing traditional cultures of China and will continue to do that as his life's work.

*Every moment, every punch, and every kick carry the athlete's honor and dream. I must pass on the spirit, morale, and dream to the next generation. There could be a limit to competing in this sport. But there is no limit to promoting it. So, it became my mission to promote his sport to the world. I joined every Martial Arts community and organization. It became my mission to connect to the world through his sport. I thought that a school experience would be a good place to start. I wanted them to share his personal and Wushu experience.*

*Chinese Martial Arts will not merely exercise the body physically, it passes on the spirit of self-improvement and determination to the young students. It will be the foundation to a better future for the child. I want my students to remember that. He added that Wushu is a show-window for Martial Arts Spirit and Chinese culture. Students must be ingrained with pride and honor to their culture.*

#### **4.6. Reflection:**

It all began with my fascination with the idea of flying rooftops and leaping over the walls, the young martial artists began to dream big. “Shaolin Temple” was a video adaptation of a well-known novel authored by Jin Yang. In this movie, my thoughts on Martial Arts were chiseled which brought me to a deep realization of what I want to be. That very moment was a turning point in my life. I knew what was at stake once I dedicated my life to Martial Arts. It will be a long and bumpy road. I will not quit. The movie “**Shaolin Temple**” spoke to him as if telling him to start his journey. He responded without question.

As a child, I was sickly. With this, I can attest that Martial Arts can contribute to the current problems of the new millennium. I am a revelation of what it can do to a person. In fact, evidence points to the health benefits one gets from this sport. Kung Fu and Taijiquan are examples of Martial Arts that connect an athlete to nature. Thus, it is established that it can positively help someone who is actively engaged in this sport. Lloyd & Fuller (2019)

When I met my teacher, I believe that he embodied the principle of Martial Arts which was to “teach, train, and entertain (Overton, 2017).” Apprenticeship according to the Martial Artist is “a form of inheritance and continuation to pass down the knowledge and skills.” I added that a Martial Arts teacher must embrace the student and must be willing to teach him. However, the student must have the sincerity and desire to learn. I have lived this kind of life since then. It brought me to many places and opportunities that I never thought I would ever reach.

Teaching brought me new perspectives. It led me to believe that athletic experience will help draw the theoretical foundation, effective demonstration, and incorporate the right values and attitudes among my students. What makes martial arts education unique is how its philosophy and self-reflection are embedded into the curriculum (Johnson, 2016). It must be genuinely ingrained in every learner. Generally, students are curious about my personal life. Hence, I eagerly share it with them to motivate and inspire them to work harder and excel in this field. Johnson (2016) believes that sharing experiences draws students to resemble my attitude and behavior. I use my fame as a practical demonstration of the kind of future they may lead.

I see beyond the eyes of my student. I feel. I discern. I learn. I speak. I preach. I cry. I discovered it. I pout. I imagine. I respect others. I listen. Above all, I love with all my heart. These are a few of the many things I do within and beyond the four corners of my classroom. In putting all these emotions together, you may learn to understand deeply what goes within the hearts and minds of my students. I believe that my profession as a teacher allows me to become cognizant of the people around me. As I age, I see more clearly the fundamental role of education in shaping the very core of humanity. Hence, we must use this power to infuse Aristotle's ideology: *“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”*

The moment I walked into a classroom full of all sorts of students, I accepted that this is what I am meant to be. Then I told myself, *“I am courageous”*. Teaching takes courage. Courage is what makes a teacher. This is how I perceive my profession. It takes courage to accept that this profession is not for the weak, unprepared, apathetic, indolent, and timid. Accepting this challenge and brace yourself for all the unexpected can be scary. When people you love tell you that the future of your children is at stake once you devote yourself to the teaching profession takes boldness. To accept that you are human and at some point, you may falter and show weakness at any given point is courageous. The confidence you take could not be equated to any material entity. Notwithstanding that you can make and unmake a person is the most incredible act of sacrifice.

Finally, these realizations did not just present themselves. It took me a lifetime to accept and prepare for the challenges that may come. At some point, I doubted myself to carry such great responsibility. However, I realized the immense fulfillment it has brought in my life. I teach. I believe. I can. I will persist. I will rise victoriously in this profession.

## **5. Conclusion**

My teaching practices and methods reflect my experiences as an athlete. I must state that I have provided and instilled a whole unique dynamic in my students. Teacher-athletes are the epitome of success as they know how it is to be a hard-working student. They have seen it all in the field and in the classroom. This I believe spells out their difference from all other teachers. My teaching style can reflect my arduous life in the field as an athlete. I have extensively narrated my personal life and used it as a springboard to show what I have become as a teacher. Becoming a teacher gave me the power to influence others to do better in the realm of education. I have learned to use this power to draw inspiration from my students. As a result, my students are given clarity on what direction they must take when presented with opportunities. However, this qualitative research is limited to the autobiographical notes of a single teacher-athlete. For future researchers, it is recommended to expand the sample size and venture into other research designs to immerse more meaningful data on this phenomenon.

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