

## Is it time to say goodbye to teacher appreciation dinners?

May 22, 2016, By Daniel J. Bauer

Graduates at high schools and universities all over Taiwan are dealing these days with traditional “xie shih yen” questions. As much as I enjoy these celebrations, I believe we are long overdue in our need to change some of their aspects.

We often translate the Romanized “xie shih yen,” by the way, as “thank you teacher dinner.” The use of “teacher” here may be confusing. Since these dinners are sometimes confusing enough, let’s be pro-active.

In American English (which is not necessarily superior to Canadian English, or British, or Filipino, or Indian English) “teacher” generally refers to educators at work in grade schools and high schools. “College teachers” usually means “university professors” in the broad sense of the term. As a rule, “professors” is the way to go if you are talking about teachers in colleges or universities.

“Professor” has the advantage of sounding a bit distinguished.

No one calls me “professor.” (Boo-hoo!) People generally call me by my spiritual honorific, you might say, which is “Father.” Surely I am blessed and privileged to be “Father Bauer.” (But you may call me professor, if you want. I won’t mind.)

The word “professor” falls softly upon the ear. It seems polite. Do you too remember how, in a former and gentler world, politeness was an important thing? Being polite meant someone was well-mannered, which to a degree suggested he or she had a high sense of “EQ” (emotional quotient of intelligence).

Comparison and contrast may be helpful. It is highly doubtful that many people would term Donald Trump polite, or say he has high EQ.

By calling an educator “professor,” we do not distinguish whether he or she is a full professor, academically speaking, or an associate or an assistant professor. Sometimes such distinctions are important, and sometimes they are not.

When we refer to others by their proper titles, we honor them, but we also honor ourselves, because we recognize a special relationship that exists between us and that person. Referring to someone as “my mom,” or “my uncle,” or “professor” can be an act of courtesy that is grand in its own small way. These are kind and humane ways to speak, and they convey a feeling of discernible dignity and respect.

How complicated this ordinary matter of nomenclature becomes when we get into the business of worrying, huh? And let’s be clear: these words today are about worrying, indeed. I am worried (with a small “w”) about teacher appreciation dinners, and more.

You may have noted the appearance of “business” a few lines above. A friend of mine has expressed concern about my use of “business” in this space on page 4 on Sundays. He took umbrage recently at my use of “the business of education.”

Of course “business” may have a rough edge in the arena of education. I don’t like to feel I am the employee of my students, whose parents (speaking figuratively) hire me to teach them. Effectively, however, we teachers are in this position. We are hired hands in a type of factory. Our factories are called “schools.” There are times when some of us feel as if we work on assembly lines. We deal with a barrage of expectations which seem to deny the value of our creativity, our freedom, our personalities, even our professional qualifications.

There once was something so humane in my experience of being a teacher, something almost magical, something so “whole-person focused” in my mind and feelings when I prepared my classes and mixed with my students and spoke with them in class. I am lucky in that, most of the time, I still experience teaching in these same ways.

I know younger professors who fear students will strike back in revenge if they forbid them to eat, chat, doze off, or play with smart phones in class. Although I am not similarly afraid, I do occasionally sense that students nowadays, like reluctant but lovable puppies, resist being pushed, even gently, to challenge themselves to become truly excellent.

Teacher appreciation dinners – which I feel we teachers should help pay for, and which should happen in campus cafeterias and not at five star restaurants – are times when students and teachers alike should pause and celebrate the incredibly precious relationships that we share.

These dinners are also a time for us to ask two questions. What is an education supposed to be? And what is it that we think we are doing for one another? (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

## Talking points

- 1) Your experience of a 'Xie shih yen' (Teacher thank you dinner) might be limited to your high school years. For university graduation time, do you feel students "should" or "must" sponsor a 'thank you dinner' for their professors? Yes - No - Maybe ???
- 2) This column focuses on feelings between students and teachers, and suggests that it might be better to have 'teacher thank you' dinners at school cafeterias and not at fancy hotels or other restaurants outside. Why are so many university 'thank you' held at expensive (5 star) restaurants? The writer also says that professors should help pay for the food. WShould professors help to pay?
- 3) The writer here says that in some ways, education is "a business," and the students are bosses. IS education a "business" in your view? Is education more than "buying" and "selling" knowledge?

\*\*本文章僅供讀書會參考使用，非經原作者同意，請勿任意轉載。

師生互動與社會關懷  
專欄讀書會