

From Control to Liberation: the Only Way to Teaching Democratization

On Comenius and Dewey's Teaching Democratic Ideas

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Abstract—Dewey and Comenius lived in different times. They are outstanding educators. And their teaching theories had a common understanding in promoting teaching democracy. They all criticize the non-democratic nature of traditional education characterized by "control" and publicize democratic teaching centered on "liberating" students. From "control" to "liberation", it is the only way for teaching democratization.

Keywords—Comenius; Dewey; teaching democracy; control; liberation

I. INTRODUCTION

Dewey and Comenius are educators living in different eras apart more than two centuries. In the teaching democratic ideas that focus on promoting the growth and development of people, the two masters' teaching theories have resonance across the space. From the accusation of non-democratic teaching, which is characterized by "control", to the esteem of teaching democratic thoughts centered on "liberation", it has explained the true connotation of people-oriented education.

II. CONTROL: THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NON-DEMOCRATIC TEACHING

Whether it is Comenius or Dewey, the idea of teaching democracy is based on the non-democratic teaching tradition or the criticism of the status quo.

Starting from the ultimate idea that man is the noblest, most perfect, and the most beautiful creature, Comenius advocated that everyone should receive thorough education in the school. However, when examining the school education at that time, Comenius was extremely disappointed. "The school is not set up for the entire society. It is only for the wealthy. It costs money to enter the school. Poor people can't go to school except when they have some kind of opportunity, such as someone who has pity on them." [1]⁴⁶ And the instructors have endlessly asked the students to write dictationally. The students are required to memorize and the teaching method of the school is "very harsh". The school becomes a horror place for children. Also, it becomes the "slaughterhouse of children's intelligence." [1]⁴⁶ "They have used the mind for more than five years, ten years, or

even more than ten years in something that can be mastered in a year. It was possible to gently import something intellectual. However, it was crudely printed. No, they would just stuff in and entered in it. The thing that can be clearly and brightly placed in front of the mind is viewed obscurely, puzzlingly and misleadingly, as if it were a complex riddle." [1]⁴⁷ In schools, not only are virtues and beliefs neglected, but also intellectual training has rarely been practically nurtured. All of them are just "full of emptiness, parrot-like words, and useless opinions." [1]⁴⁷ Under the control of this harsh method, most students are tired of learning. They may leave school. Even if they stay at the end, what they obtain is only "absurd and harmful education." Comenius used his personal experience to prove that this useless school education would waste the youth. However, educators who are conscientious and responsible would bemoan the state of the universe and pity the fate of mankind. While sighing and worrying, they rationally believe that every effort should be made to contribute their own suggestions for education to newcomers. "We point out how our teachers have treated us and how our teachers lead us to go the wrong road. And then, we can point out ways to avoid this kind of mistake." [1]⁴⁸ The Great Didactic" discusses the teaching art. That is on how teachers can avoid mistakes and follow the correct methods to create lofty, perfect and beautiful people.

Dewey said: "Education is a process of raising, nurturing and cultivating." [2]¹⁶ He discriminates carefully the meanings of the words "guidance", "control" and "persuasion" and advocates guidance for children. "People should be cautious. Sometimes we should add the meaning of 'control'." [2]³⁰ The control has the implication of repression and coercion. Sometimes people's stimulation such as orders, prohibitions, approvals and condemnations would have the direct purpose of influencing the actions. Dewey criticized the shortcomings of traditional education represented by Herbart's thoughts. He criticized the undemocratic issues of school organization and practice. "In traditional schools, teachers' personal orders are often used excessively. And the order in traditional schools is completely by obeying the will of an adult. [3]²⁷⁰ "In the name of discipline and good order, people often make the situation of the school as monotonous as possible. Tables and chairs are placed in the fixed positions. Strict military-style management of students is performed. The students

read the same textbooks over and over again for long periods of time and reject other readings. Apart from memorizing the materials in textbooks, the others are all forbidden. In teaching, 'orderliness' is emphasized. They exclude natural performance. Similarly, it also excludes novelty and variability." [3]⁵² This kind of education has made the school be an annoying place. The students' learning would be a boring and mechanical thing. The school cannot achieve the true purpose. And the traditional curriculum is also out of step with the needs of children and away from the children's experience world and social needs. "We don't study what exactly children need in their growth. However, we just have the knowledge accumulated by adults imposed on children. Those are irrelevant things." [4]²¹⁶ These learners' things beyond the actual experience hinder the development of children's thinking and cause a great waste of children's lives. Since knowledge was regarded as the learning purpose, traditional schools adopt the teaching mode of "quiet listening", use "injection" teaching methods, and pay attention to memory, memorization and examinations. "When children memorize something successfully, they would be rewarded. If the memory is unsuccessful, the children will be punished by failing or low scores.... By leaving the student in a completely passive attitude, he is more likely to give back what he learned from the teacher or read in the book. [4]³⁶³⁻³⁶⁴ While the teacher is in the position of "supervisor or dictator". The indoctrination teaching is deeply ingrained. This kind of education not only does not stimulate the nature of children's automatic inquiry, but it also drives children to be forced to use the symbols representing things. Those are books. People would use external forces to replace children's potential motivation. This kind of "duck-stuffing" instillation of knowledge is tantamount to forcing blind people who do not have eyes to watch everything. It is tantamount to bringing a horse that does not think of drinking water to the river and force it to drink. The education of neglecting the nature is obviously stupid. [5]¹⁵ Dewey not only recognized the problem of non-democratic education, but also found the root of the problem from the viewpoint of traditional knowledge. This is what he called the "bystander theory of knowledge". This theory establishes a metaphysical dualism between the cognitive "subject" and the perceived "object". The cognitive person is separated from the perceived object. It is the same as "spectators" and "outsiders". Cognition is understood as a passive event "presented" to the perceiver by an object of knowledge. The cognitive subject "is completely passive and silent in cognition" and is a "non-participant". [6]⁶² The value of knowledge only stays in control. Dewey proposed to reform the theory of knowledge and construct an "experiential cognitive theory".

From the above, we can see that non-democracy in education stems from two aspects. First is the deviation of educational purpose. In the opinion of Comenius, the school did not give such comprehensive education as knowledge, virtue and devotion. The school never thought of moral life, causing people to abandon the "tree of life". And people overuse their desires in the "tree of knowledge". The intellectual progress is pursued blindly, and others are neglected. Dewey bluntly states that school education

regards knowledge as a purpose, takes preparation for the future as its purpose, and disregards the individual's existing ability. The school education believes that to achieve certain achievements and responsibilities is the purpose. This is not the original meaning of education. With the purpose of education imposed by the outside, the work of teachers and students become mechanical and slave. The second is the induction of rigid teaching methods. Comenius and Dewey have severely criticized the rigid and indoctrination teaching method. And it ignores children's growing needs, and greatly stifles children's initiative and interest in learning. It is the direct embodiment of non-democratic teaching.

III. LIBERATION: THE CORE MEANING OF TEACHING DEMOCRACY

The opposite of control is liberation. To liberate children from harsh, mandatory and inhuman circumstances, give children dignity and respect their development needs is the core of teaching democracy. And it is also the key to education. Comenius and Dewey paid great attention to this point. However, they did not explicitly use the term "liberation". We can still make the examination from the two dimensions of education methods and education purpose.

What is the purpose of education? Comenius made a design. All young people can be educated. They can learn everything that can make people become intelligent, virtuous and trustworthy. The education is a preparation for life and can be completed before adulthood. [1]⁴⁹ Comenius' doctrine has a strong sense of religion. In his mind, education is necessary for everyone. And it is a way for people to become human. In his opinion, the "ultimate goal of human beings" is to be a rational animal. Human beings should be capable of dominating all things, and share the eternal happiness with God. He believes that erudition, virtue and devotion should be the fundamental purpose of education. And he considers that other things such as health, power, beauty, wealth, honor, friendship, luck, etc., are just a kind of incidental decoration. Excessive pursuit is harmful to people. He emphasized the organic connection among the erudition, virtue and devotion. And he believed that "bad teaching couldn't lead the teachings of virtue and delirium". "Knowledge should not be combined with immorality. It should be combined with morality. And then, they can add luster to each other." [1]⁴⁴ Essentially, Comenius emphasizes the harmonious development of human beings and their all-round development.

Dewey discusses the purpose of education from the perspective of philosophy. "Education is life". "Education is growth". "The process of education has no purpose beyond itself. It is the purpose." [2]⁵⁸ What he meant was that the purpose of education was the process of education. And it isn't to impose the purpose of the education process from the outside." He made an analogy. If parents or teachers put forward their own purpose as a legitimate goal for the growth of children, it would be equally absurd to suggest a ideal of neglecting the environment for the farmer. "If every action of a student is presumably ordered by the teacher, the only order for many of his actions comes from homework assignments and instructions from others. The purpose of

education is nonsense." [2]¹¹² The purpose imposed from outside or subject to power is fixed, rigid and harmful. However, it will hinder the realization of true educational purposes. To this end, Dewey proposed three characteristics of good educational purpose. A purpose of education must be based on the inherent activities and needs of the specific individual being educated. It must be translated into ways of collaborating with the activities of the educated person. It can expand people's eyes and inspire them to consider more results (ie, links). [2]¹¹⁹⁻¹²¹ Dewey emphasizes that education cannot ignore the individual's special abilities and requirements, and must pay attention to the personal development tendency of the educated, instead of being monotonous and uniform. At the same time, it should create "the environment to liberate and organize their capabilities". It helps them have a more comprehensive understanding of what may be achieved in the future. And then, the fewer activities are less constrained by few alternative methods. The activities are sustained in a productive manner. This kind of education is a living education based on the growth and development of people.

In terms of teaching methods, Comenius advocated that the teaching couldn't use the harshness or coercion method. It could be implemented as gently and lightly as possible. Also, it is not necessary to force the limb to stretch while the creatures having physical growth. He believed that such education was not hypocrisy but real; it was not superficial but thorough; it was not difficult but very easy. He said: "The pan-wisdom curriculum needs pan-wisdom approach. It needs an omniscience and self-adapting, easy and pleasant way to make the teachers and learners not feel disgusted by laboriousness. However, they can have the achievement and fun of labor. The school is no longer a labyrinth or an old mill. It is no longer a prison or mental torture. It is entertainment and a palace. It is a great enjoyment. It is heaven." [7]⁷³ To this end, he proposed the principles of convenience, thoroughness, conciseness, and promptness in teaching, advocating that classroom teaching should be minimized. The students only have four-hour class a day. And the students should be forced to remember as little as possible". He proposed a class teaching system in which a teacher can teach hundreds of students at the same time. Thereby, it would achieve the goal of "allowing teachers to teach less, but students can learn more". This idea of Comenius has had great influences on the teaching of later generations. Even today, class teaching is still the main classroom teaching method.

Based on the critique of old education and the understanding of the relationship between knowledge and behavior from a philosophical point of view, Dewey puts forward the idea of "learning from doing" and considers that "learning from doing is a better method than listening to learning". [4]²⁷⁴ "Learning from doing" is a correction of traditional teachers' teaching methods and students' listening methods. It is an effective combination of knowledge and practice. It is the teaching methods that students make full use of their own experience to gain growth, and get genuine knowledge from their own activities. According to Dewey's opinion, children are born with a natural desire to work. And

all educational activities are mainly driven by children's instinctive, impulse-driven interest. This kind of instinctive development takes precedence over passiveness. It cannot be suppressed. Teachers should use this kind of instinct to give random guidance. Then, it would have the development. "When children are continuously engaged in any kind of unconstrained activity—when they are busy, they are almost always happy—and so are adults." [4]¹⁸⁰ "Learning from doing" method enables children to find things that they like best or to do. Children initiate activities, organize their own games, give themselves math problems, and arrange the plays. They are doing work that attracts them and is meaningful to them. In Dewey's view, it is necessary to rule out actions that are forced or ordered by outsiders in the "learning from doing", actions that cannot be introduced into the wider future, and habitual and mechanical actions. Second, children of different ages have different requirements for doing things and activities. They can't be regularized in doing things and engaging in activities. [8]^{332 ~ 335} The kind of teaching methods led by teachers would make textbooks occupy the dominant position. This can make children's thinking become dull.

Dewey and Comenius are very concerned about the development and growth of the students. They all pay attention to the nature of children, eliminating all constraints and controls on children, guiding them to develop freely, and finding a humanized and democratic teaching method suitable for students' development. In particular, Dewey regarded "learning from doing" as an important feature of modern education in modern society. He pointed out: "The combination education of learning and doing will replace the passive education that teaches others to learn. No matter how good the latter is, it is no more than adapting to the feudal society. In that society, most people must always obey the authority of the chief. On this basis, the established education is based on the principle of creativity and independence. And every citizen should be engaged in the affairs of common interests. The democratic society is incongruous. [4]^{296 ~ 297} We have introduced Comenius' class teaching system. However, we have neglected the advice that the classroom teaching time should be reduced as much as possible, teachers should try to teach as little as possible, and students should memorize as little as possible. We have already promoted Dewey's ideas. And we have been trying to localize our educational thinking. However, we still see that the textbooks are the masters. In the class, it mainly shows the lectures of teachers and the students' listening. How can "child-centered" be more than just a slogan?

IV. FROM CONTROL TO LIBERATION: THE ONLY WAY TO ACHIEVE TEACHING DEMOCRACY

Comenius believes that people have great potential for development. The problem is that people have the opportunity and ability to develop. There is no need to force them. The acquisition of knowledge lies in the volunteering for knowledge. In the teaching process, the method should be natural. However, it also allows students to more contact with the facts, uses intuitive to make the teaching. The knowledge comes from the senses and relies on senses to

make prove. Dewey directly regards democracy as the reference point for education. "The educational process is conducted in a democratic or non-democratic way. It has become a particularly important issue." [9]⁴⁹ The essence of teaching democracy lies in the liberation of individuals. How to achieve surpass from the control to liberation is the key to teaching whether it can move toward democracy.

A. The Liberation of Spirit

In Comenius and Dewey's educational theory system, people are very prominent factors. Human harmony, freedom and happiness are good visions of education. The spiritual liberation of this kind of person is also the fundamental purport of education. Comenius's "The Great Didactic" is a kind of teaching art that remodels old schools and old education. It is "an art that teaches people to feel happy. That is, it does not make the teacher feel annoyed or make the student feel disgusted. And it can make teachers and students have the greatest happiness." [1] Dewey strongly emphasized the student's "freedom" and advocated "to give children freedom. And the children can find what he can do and what he can't do within the limits of his ability and what other people allow. They will not take the time to do those impossible things and focus on possible things." [4]^{284 ~ 285} To give students freedom, children will be able to receive comprehensive, psychological, personality and physical development of the best training. Children's "freedom" is the freedom to grow and develop. It includes external freedom from restrictions on physical activity. More importantly, it is intellectual freedom. Namely, that is internal freedom." What is worth pondering is the difference between the current education situation we are facing and the old education criticized by Comenius and Dewey. In disciplined institutionalized education, individuals are constantly disciplined, dominated, and obeyed. Thus, it would become an educational product that is produced. The children's happiness, innocence, liveliness and freedom are disappeared with 8 hours or even more time for learning and the boundless time of the vast sea of homework and exercises. The suppression of scores, the discrimination of ranks, the hegemony of standard answers have deprived children's rights to self-development and fair opportunities. The liberation of spirit is the primary principle for pursuing teaching democracy and promoting the free and happy development of students.

B. Liberation of Personality

Each individual has its own differences and particularities. The democracy education must respect this difference and particularity. Comenius divided people into six categories based on their different personalities, and specifically proposed different ways to teach students in accordance with their aptitude. Dewey has always opposed the stereotyped development of individuals and advocated that democratic education should cultivate a "new type of personality." He particularly emphasized the role of children's "experience". Respecting children's individuality is to respect the laws of children's growth and treat children as growing people. Children cannot be asked to meet adult standards. And adult goals cannot be imposed on children.

We should respect the children's personality, reduce the control in the education process, abandon the indoctrination, pay attention to the connection between curriculum, teaching materials, teaching and children's life, inspire children's interest in learning, and ensure children's basic freedom and rights. The publicity of children's personality is based on the establishment of an equal teacher-student relationship. "When textbooks and teachers have the right to speak, the development of wisdom and character learning will not happen." "[9]²⁸ It advocates individualized development of children, while Comenius and Dewey all emphasizes the role of discipline. Children should have space for free growth and should be disciplined. Discipline is necessary to ensure the freedom of children. To respect for individuality does not mean unprincipled indulgence, otherwise it will go to the other extreme.

C. Liberation of Creativity

The children are persons with subjective nature. The desire and creativity of children's self-directed learning can be said to be inborn. Comenius advocated that "the children's desire to learn and study should be inspired in every possible way." [1]⁹² And he pointed out that any knowledge should not be obtained from books. People should deduct knowledge from the unchanging principles of things, and learn to study from the origin rather than learn from others' observation. He believes that traditional teaching is out of life. The students are accustomed to not using their own eyes. And they are accustomed to seeing the world and real life with the eyes of the writer. This kind of teaching can only memorize some terms and conclusions. Even if there is some development in thinking, it is still not its own wisdom. It can only repeat the thoughts of others, and students' independent judgment ability and creative ability are not developed. And the students can only copy that of other people. [10]⁸² Similarly, Dewey believed that "we couldn't tell education. It was an active and constructive process". [2]⁴⁶ In the process of education, any compulsory indoctrination is contrary to the nature of children or the laws of education. It must arouse the initiative of children and give full play to their creativity. Tao Xingzhi, as a student of Dewey, further developed Dewey's educational ideas and put forward the idea of "combination of teaching, learning and working". In particular, he proposed to liberate children's creativity. "We have discovered that children have creativity. And then, we must further liberate children's creativity." "[11]⁵⁹⁴ He proposed "six liberations": liberating children's eyes, liberating children's minds, liberating children's hands, liberating children's mouths, liberating children's space, and liberating children's time. In this way, children can have better access to nature, and integrate into a larger society. It will be more conducive to the development of creativity. The emancipation of creativity contributes to the development of children's potential, and it is also the core meaning of education democratization.

V. CONCLUSION

The fundamental purpose of education is to train people. The significance of education lies in guiding children's

harmonious and healthy growth from the nature of children to realize the greatest possibility of their development. All non-democratic disciplines and punishments that violate the law of children's growth are often counterproductive and contrary to the law of education. Whether it is Dewey or Comenius, their greatness lies in liberating the nature of liberating children, giving children dignity, and respecting their growth needs and development needs, to promote their development with a humanized and democratic teaching method suitable for children's development. From control to liberation, providing freedom and space to children from the aspects of spirit, individuality and creativity, we can maximize the potential of children and realize the all-round development of people.

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