

The Thought on Whitehead's *the Purpose of Education*: Ideological and Political Education Oriented to Life Itself

Wanyi He

College of Marxism, Zhejiang University Hangzhou 310028, China

hewanyi1106@foxmail.com

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Abstract: Alfred North Whitehead, a British educator, believed that the purpose of education was to cultivate intelligent people, and the only theme of education is life. The "two precepts" and "two principles" in his educational thought have profound enlightening significance for examining various problems in contemporary education and teaching. With Whitehead's view of educational purpose, the development of ideological and political education can be considered in the new era. It is conducive to maintaining the reasonable tension between society and individuals, history and future, ideal and reality, and pushing ideological and political education to break through the bottleneck and achieve better development.

1. Introduction

The purpose of education is the meta-question in the field of education. It lays a theoretical foundation for the development of education and points out a clear direction for the practice of education. The great philosopher and educator of the 20th century, Alfred North Whitehead, stated in the book "The Purpose of Education" that man is the fundamental purpose of education and the only subject of education is life. Its educational thought helps us to understand the essence of education and grasp the law of education, so it has profound thinking value and enlightenment significance for the development of today's education.

2. Two Precepts to be Shunned in Education

"To be extensive" or "to be specialized" has always been heatedly discussed in terms of the training of talents. Whitehead clearly stated at the beginning of the book "The Purpose of Education" that "our goal is to train talents with extensive cultural accomplishments and expertise in a particular area." [1] In order to stimulate students' vitality and avoid rigid ideas, Whitehead put forward specific requirements for the quantity and quality of educational content.

2.1 Quantity: Do not Teach Too Many Subjects at the Same Time.

Whitehead criticized the old education system for giving too much attention to a single subject with no obvious characteristics. Whitehead believes that if too many subjects are taught at the same time in school, students can only learn the surface knowledge, which will cause students' passive acceptance of some irrelevant knowledge and cannot arouse the spark of any ideological vitality. [1] Education should keep children maintain a certain concentration at all stages of development. Whitehead elaborated on the direction in which each stage of education should focus on strength: 8-12 years old is the stage of romantic perception. 12-15 years old is the precise stage of language and the romantic stage of science. 15-16 years old is the comprehensive stage of language and the precise stage of science. According to the development of children's intelligence, there will be a harmonious picture in the students' minds, and the educators will be able to take the most suitable measures accordingly.

The value of "concentration" is even more pronounced in today's society. Since humanity

entered a new era of the Internet, information has become the first factor of production. The production and dissemination of massive information has reduced the “signal-to-noise ratio” of today’s society, and the noise of interference in various types of information is increasing, and effective signals are becoming less and less. However, the information that the human brain can receive and process is limited. In the face of complicated information, people will only choose a part of information that is of interest to them and closely related to their own interests, and that has the ability to process it autonomously, and the rest of the information will become an overwhelming message. In education, the preconditions for achieving “concentration” are also “limited”. Limited means that there is a focus. If students can recognize that the limited information that teachers pass is the most important and valuable information for themselves, they will be more focused on information processing. At the same time, limited means psychological comfort, limited and high-quality information is more acceptable to students, so as to achieve the desired educational effect.

2.2 Quality: Teach Knowledge Thoroughly.

Whitehead said that the broad path of enjoyment of education often leads to a bad ending. Satisfactory knowledge of educational transmission must first be of value. Marx once said, “As long as the theory is thorough, you can convince people.” [2] A thorough theory is the prerequisite for a thorough education. On the one hand, knowledge must meet the accuracy criteria, and after thorough logical reasoning or practice testing, it has a wide range of applicability and the possibility of convincing the educational object; On the other hand, knowledge must meet the criteria of usefulness, and the knowledge transmitted by education must meet the needs of students in many aspects and can be applied in life practice. Metaphysically, the metaphysical means that the “qi” is knowledge, the “dao” is wisdom, the “qi” is the foundation, and the “dao” is transcendence. The more significant significance of education is to teach students to “recognize the woods with the help of trees” so that they can gain wisdom.

Therefore, how should education guide students to acquire knowledge and use knowledge on their own? Whitehead believes that the dynamic balance between freedom and training is the two necessary factors for achieving “transparent” education. At any stage of education, there can be no training or freedom, and freedom is more important, essential and purposeful than training. Whitehead believes that the enjoyment of freedom can bring emotional pleasure. If students are able to fully develop their abilities while completing their work, and strive to reap the expected obvious effects, students will develop habits of happily completing their work in life. The enjoyment of freedom is the inevitable way to master wisdom. When an individual can choose knowledge and use knowledge autonomously, its use of knowledge will also rise from a spontaneous passive state to a conscious and active state, thus achieving the promotion from “qi” to “dao”.

3. Two Principles to be Followed in Education

Education must avoid the two precepts of excessive quantity and low quality, and also follow the two principles of appropriate speed and reasonable scale. In terms of speed, the rhythm of education must be consistent with the rhythm changes in people’s minds, and in turn satisfy the students’ interest needs, cognitive needs and emotional needs; on the scale, educators must let students learn from contact and provide an experiential learning that is self-involved, entertaining, and applied.

3.1 Speed: Consistent with the Rhythm of Human Thought.

Whitehead understands education as a “procedural whole that is gradually and gradually developed from low to high with rhythm and cycle”. [3] When talking about Latin teaching, Whitehead’s speed of teaching is too fast or too slow to affect the effect of language learning. Too fast can lead to ambiguity in teaching, ignoring the exquisiteness of language, but if the speed of learning is too slow, then the great epic will become boring. Whether the teacher “teaches” or the student “learns” the speed must be consistent with the rhythm changes in the human mind. Untimely education will only stifle the enthusiasm and imagination of life, and is not conducive to the generation of wisdom and the acquisition of beauty. [4]

In the age of informationization, we may wish to regard education as a process in which educators transmit educational information to students. When students first come into contact with educational information, their understanding will first stay on the unstable and non-persistent perceptual level. At this time, teachers should grasp the students' interest points and "pain points", keep their long-term attention and meet the students' interest needs. Next, educators should exert their strengths in the content of educational information, and guide students to identify the truth of knowledge, its relevance to itself, and its applicability in real life, to meet the cognitive needs of students. When the understanding has completed a leap from perceptual to rational in the student's mind, the teacher also needs to stimulate the positive emotions of the students to meet the emotional needs of the students. By guiding students to emotionally recognize the knowledge and value transmitted by education, they are willing to externalize their spiritual power into actual behavior through practice, and implement it in effect.

3.2 Scale: Students Must Learn Through Contact.

The theoretical basis of Whitehead's educational purpose is one of his body (process) philosophy and his unique understanding of "human", and the second is his deep reflection on the loss of freedom and education alienation of modern people. [5] Whitehead believes that exploring the history of the past must not start with a general statement, but must start with specific examples and allow students to learn from contact. "Learning from contact" is an experiential learning method in which the educator intuitively demonstrates, entertains and learns, and learners participate and learn to use it. Intuitive contact and experience can bring students a new kind of excitement, new feelings, and take the initiative to learn the fun of learning. When learning in contact becomes a heartfelt desire, students will voluntarily and devotedly. The knowledge at this time is no longer a simple, blunt symbol, but a wisdom that can be used flexibly in life. The affinity of the educator and the sense of acquisition of the students are also generated.

"Learning from contact" means making the knowledge vivid and lively, freeing students from the details and retention principles. If the textbook knowledge and education system are compared to "raw materials" and "recipes", then the teacher will creatively reconstruct and reconstruct the knowledge through the processing of raw materials and the unique understanding of the recipes, thus presenting a table of delicious content feast. [6] In this sense, "learning from contact" can be understood as an educational method of image narration. Different from the abstract narrative of meaning-based abstraction, image narrative is a kind of narrative mode with both meaning and image. It is an educational method with both scientific and artistic sense. "Connotation" is the connotation and philosophy of teaching content, and is the fundamental purpose of educational activities; "image" is the experience and feeling that teaching brings to students, and it is the source of teaching beauty and learning fun. Educators must ensure that the content of education guides students to understand problems, analyze problems, and solve the scientific and feasible problems. At the same time, it is necessary to enhance the vividness, reality and sense of the times of the educational content and even the entire educational activities, and to convey the abstract and profound philosophy through a concrete and vivid image.

4. Current Reflection on Whitehead's Education Thought

People are the fundamental purpose of education, and the only theme of education is life. Whitehead pays attention to the individual growth rules and development needs of students, and the educational thoughts based on life and relying on life, still have great reference and enlightenment significance. As an educational activity with clear goals and special missions, ideological and political education needs to extract the essence and deal with its own unity of opposites.

4.1 Society and Individuals: Maintaining a Reasonable Tension between Education and the State.

What kind of effect do people expect from education, and what direction they want to be educated, and they are influenced by the value of specific education. Value is a kind of relationship,

which is the satisfaction of the object attribute to the subject. The class characteristics of education determine the “subjective needs” of education not only to meet the needs of individual survival and development, but also to meet the needs of national and social stability and progress. Ideological and political education is one of the primary contents of the construction of spiritual civilization in China and one of the main ways to solve the main contradictions of society. The social value contained in it is self-evident. However, only by virtue of the unilateral social driving force, ideological and political education is “difficult to stand alone”. Only by exerting the combined effect of individual initiative and social promotion, ideological and political education can achieve ideal results. One of the reasons for the relative weakness of ideological and political education in China today is the failure to fully realize the effective integration and transformation of the social and individual values of ideological and political education.

The ideological and political education in the new era should be an ideological and political education to implement new ideas, realize new missions, and meet the needs of the people of the new era. In colleges and universities, if ideological and political education wants to strengthen students' recognition of the country and gather the power of thought, it is necessary to find a balance between “national ideology” and “individual freedom and life” to maintain their reasonable tension. If “thought” is the defense of individual freedom rights, “politics” is the implementation of the state's public will, then “education” is the connection between “thought” and “politics”, linking the individual's free development and the country's stability and progress. How to establish a benign relationship between educators and educators in the “happy teaching” and to show the dual concern of ideological and political education on individual values and social values is an important topic for thinking and exploring in the new era of ideological and political education.

4.2 History and the Future: Using the Current Sense of Responsibility and Awe.

Whitehead's philosophy of process believes that life is not a constant entity, but a process of change. [7] People's time has its “width”. “Now” is not just a moment in the moment, but a “sacred place”. It contains everything, both the past and the future. However, since people can only live in the current events of every minute and every second, they can only use the past to reflect on the past and shape the future. People must have a comprehensive understanding of the current time, give high priority, and use the “present” to connect the past and the future for a better life.

How do educators use the “present” to develop ideal education and achieve satisfactory goals? Whitehead first criticized the idea of “taking the brain into a tool”. The human brain is eternal. The educator should not expect the brain to be sharpened like a tool. Whitehead calls this idea the “most deadly, most outrageous, and most dangerous point of view” in education. [1] Therefore, Whitehead believes that “regardless of the student's interest in your course, this interest must be motivated at this time; no matter what ability you need to strengthen your students, this ability must be practiced at this time; no matter how you want to influence the future spiritual world of your students, you must show it now.” [1] “The present” is a valuable opportunity that educators can't miss. “Life” is the starting point and the foothold of the current action. Educational activities are not only the process of “teaching” by educators, but also the process of “learning” and “using” the objects of education. In order to guide the educators to have the willingness to “learn” and consciously use them in the present, Whitehead proposes to cultivate students' sense of “responsibility” and “a sense of awe”. “Responsibility” is a kind of “knowledge conscience”, that is, when an individual has the opportunity to acquire knowledge without learning, ignorance is sin; When it acquires knowledge but does not use it, knowledge is a waste; “a sense of awe” is a fear of life, awe of the present, and a sense of urgency. Education should cultivate individual desires for self-seeking and self-consciousness, and use their current actions to carry history and lay the future.

4.3 Ideal and Reality: the Sublimity and Practicality of Balanced Education in Life.

It is different from the ancient Greek philosophers who emphasize the pursuit of knowledge and devalue the value of knowledge tools and the modern philosophers who emphasize the technical application value of knowledge. Whitehead emphasizes that knowledge is the unity of sublimity and practicality, and is the unity of rational value and instrumental value. On the one hand, knowledge

is the product of human beings who love wisdom and pursue truth, and has its inner beauty and value; On the other hand, “knowledge that cannot be used is quite harmful” [1]. Knowledge must be able to arm the present and shape life. This idea also appeared in Whitehead’s discussion of the relationship between technical education and science and literature. Whitehead believes that Plato’s “free education” ideal is not suitable for humans. This insistence on unbiased intellectual appreciation is separate from education itself, leading to the decline of human civilization; and if you only think of technology education as a system of highly specialized manual skills that are taught to children, it is also bound to face a failed outcome. Education must cultivate students to be fully informed and good at action, and the eternal theme is life.

Life is the origin and destination of human beings. Daily life is more important as a "residential" for the socialization of ideological and political education. [8] The individual’s ideology and morality must be constructed in personal experience and life practice. The value and effectiveness of ideological and political education can only be manifested in daily life. Therefore, ideological and political education must not only convey the value ideals beyond the normal state of life to students, but also guide students to pursue the reality of a better life. In the new era, ideological and political education must be rooted in the world of life and meet the growing needs of individuals in many aspects. It is necessary to transform political discourse into life discourse, and to raise the value of knowledge to the value of life. It not only solves life problems but also solves ideological problems, and realizes the unity of ideal and reality of ideological and political education in paying attention to life, being close to life and guiding life.

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