

## Re-recognition of Herbart's Teaching Theory

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**Abstract.** Herbart, as a representative of traditional education theory, has had a major impact on world education, but in recent years it has been quite cold. In fact, Herbart's teaching thoughts not only have their specific value in history, but they are far from obsolete today. Herbart's stage theory of teaching through the development of his disciples is not only the most suitable for the efficient teaching organization of the class teaching system, but also the most practical guiding significance for teacher education. At present, the cold reception of Herbart's academic thought will inevitably lead to the decline of the quality of teacher education and basic education.

### 1. Introduction

As we all know, Dewey and his school's educational thoughts are based on the criticism of Herbart's theory. From the end of the 19th century, Dewey's educational thoughts were popular in North America, Europe and China, and its influence has not declined, and even has an upward trend. Therefore, the research on Dewey's educational thoughts has also shown a continuing prosperous situation. In stark contrast to this, the study of Herbart is really "a cold horse in front of the door." That is to take China as an example. In the "Chinese Journal Full-text Database", the article titled "Dewey" was searched for a total of 1,528 articles; and only 163 articles were searched for "Herbart". Taking the master and doctoral thesis library as an example, 96 articles were searched for Dewey, and only 4 articles were searched for by Herbart. The author studies Herbart's theory, but it has curiosity: Is it that the "battle" between the Herbart School and the Dewey School has reached the point where the smoke is exhausted and there is no suspense? Because of this curiosity, the author wants to re-examine Herbart's teaching theory in order to obtain a clearer understanding.

### 2. The First Contribution of Herbart's Teaching Theory: Organizational Psychology of Teaching Content

For a long time, how to choose and organize teaching content is an important topic that many educators care about. Comenius, Lu Ling, and Costa Lozi have all deeply pondered and studied this issue. Herbart has also done a lot of work on this issue, both inherited and developed. Different from the predecessors who often based on the purely speculative or empirical basis, Herbart built the selection and organization of teaching content on the basis of psychology. Herbart's efforts made his course theory are more scientific than ever.

First, Herbart believes that the choice of teaching content should be based on the experience and interest of the learner. He believes that in ordinary life, learners have gained a lot of experience through contact with nature and society, and this should be the basis for teaching activities. Herbart believes that only content that is linked to the learner's experience can arouse children's strong interest. Only the teaching content that can stimulate interest can keep the learner's consciousness in a state of continuous excitement. Western educators commented on this, "interest is a bright light, through this bright light, Herbart brought the white sunshine into the darkness and maze of the education channel" [1]. Herbart also pointed out the way to cultivate interest. He believes: "Interest is generated by a variety of interesting objects and homework, and many aspects of interest stem from the rich sources of these objects and operations. The creation and development of this interest is the task of teaching." [2] In this way, Herbart divided the content of the teaching by classifying the interest, and constructed a huge curriculum system that contains almost all the knowledge categories at that time.

Secondly, Herbart built the organization of his chosen teaching content on the basis of psychology. This is his famous “common sense” theory. Herbart believes that the experience of organizing ideas may be messy, but the activities of people's ideas are orderly, that is, new knowledge is generated on the basis of original knowledge and ideas, which shows that The content of teaching is carefully organized. The basic principle of the organization is to enable learners to gradually transition from familiar content to closely relate but not very familiar content. He once said clearly: “The most effective and consistent arrangement of teaching in order to make each previous result prepare students for similar and far-reaching results. This is my main consideration in some educational works. Herbert's thought has had a major impact on the educational psychology of later generations. For example, in Ausubel's theory of “meaningful learning” we can see the traces of his influence.

Herbart also staged the age of the child according to the popular “cultural era” theory at the time, and arranged the teaching content accordingly. Today, although the cultural epoch theory has certain influence in the philosophical and biological fields, there is not much market in the field of education. The effectiveness of the teaching content system determined by Herbart on this basis is certainly doubtful, but Herbart’s enlightenment is that he strives to closely combine the choice and arrangement of teaching content with the psychological development of children. The “Personalization of Teaching Materials” movement at the beginning of the last century has had a tremendous impact.

Herbart's special contribution to curriculum theory is manifested in his commitment to the choice and organization of teaching content based on psychology. He himself has made it clear that the motivation for such painstaking research is that he realizes that “most of the defects in our field of education are the result of lack of psychology” [3]. His efforts have paid off, and his curriculum has overcome the blindness and arbitrariness of long-term teaching content arrangement, and thus ensured the effective and orderly teaching.

In Herbart's teaching ideology, teaching psychology can be divided into three aspects to understand. First, the development of teaching activities should be based on the basic laws of psychological activities. Second, teaching activities should also focus on the development of children's psychology. Third, the teaching process is carried out simultaneously with psychological activities and psychological development. process. In the first two points, many educators have made different levels of discussion before Hexcel. Herbart only further emphasized its importance here, and the last one should undoubtedly belong to Herbart's original ideas. Herbart believes that the process of teaching and psychological activities is consistent. The process of students learning knowledge is the psychological process of concept development. The progress of teaching itself is also accompanied by the development of learners' psychology. This idea has an extraordinary profound meaning. It organically unifies the teaching activities and the psychological development of the learners, so that the teaching not only follows the law of the learner's psychological development, but also directly promotes the development of the learner's psychology. . In other words, the psychological development of the learner is not the goal that can be achieved at the end of the teaching activity. The psychological development is carried out along with the learning of knowledge. Herbert's theory not only allows us to get rid of the long-standing “material education theory” and “formal education theory” in the history of education, but also allows us to more clearly understand Piaget and Vygotsky.

### **3. The Second Contribution of Herbart's Teaching Theory: An Effective Teaching Model In Accord With Class Teaching System**

Comenius, who believes in “generalism”, devoted his life to “teaching all knowledge to all people.” To this end, he has done a lot of work, the most famous of which is that he elaborated in “The Great Teaching Theory”. It was different from the class teaching system of individual teaching that was widely used in European schools at that time. However, under the teaching organization of the class teaching system, how should the teaching be organized to effectively “learn all knowledge to everyone”? The great educator who made a major contribution is Herbart.

Herbart believes that in order to be able to efficiently pass “all knowledge” to “all students,” one must be able to find an effective teaching process. The biggest job of Herbart in his life was to find such a program. Based on conceptual psychology, he combines multi-faceted interests with the development of students' attention and proposes the famous “teaching stage theory.” He divided the teaching activities of “class” into four main stages: “clear”, “association”, “system” and “method”. The teaching process through static and dynamic “concentration activities” and “exploration activities” The basic link is achieved. Later, Germany's Ziller and Rein expanded accordingly, and set five teaching steps: 1. Preparation: arouse the old ideas to attract interest in new knowledge; 2. Tip: teach new textbooks; 3. Lenovo (comparative and Abstract): Analyze and compare old and new knowledge to make it connected; 4. General: draw conclusions, definitions or rules; 5. Application: Use the concepts or rules to solve problems or exercises. This is the famous “five-segment teaching method.” The “Five-Segment Teaching Method” was popular in Europe and the United States at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. It was introduced to China in the late Qing Dynasty and had a wide impact on the teaching of primary and secondary schools.

Since the school education, every period has been committed to finding an effective teaching model, but until Herbart, this desire has become a reality. Although Nesta Lozi has proposed the famous “elementalism” theory and wants to simplify the teaching process, it can be said that he has not been able to achieve this goal. At a higher level, Herbart Abstracts all the elements and activities of the teaching process, making all aspects of teaching activities an organic whole. Therefore, it can be said that “the stage of teaching form” is Herbart's educational thought that has the greatest influence on later generations. Even his critics Dewey had to objectively evaluate this initiative: “Few people try to follow the general principle. To summarize the methods of the narrative and form the formula, One of them, that is, Herbart’s lectures are divided into five stages, which are extremely important for the students’ listening to the relationship, and the influence on the lecture class far more than all his claims.”[4]

The reason why Dewey made such a high evaluation of his creative object is because the stage of teaching form is extremely important to the significance of educational practice. Thanks to Herbart's efforts, teaching activities are formed into a clear and standardized procedure, which provides a model that can be referenced by all teaching activities. Any teacher, regardless of his own literacy, can be more effective according to it. For this reason, the teaching forms of Herbart and his followers can be popular in Europe, America and China. In the history of education, from ancient times to today, it can be said that basically no form of teaching can match the impact it produces.

Although Herbart’s model has now attracted more and more criticism, we should see that there are many ideas in his theory that are not obsolete today. In fact, Herbart did not pay much attention to the vividness of learners as some critics have said. Let us look at some of these arguments: “Educators strive for the universality of education, and students are individual people.” “Education should avoid infringement of personality as much as possible.” He also emphasized that if the requirements of educators and the behavior of students Inconsistent and there is no “with substantial advantages and disadvantages between the two, ... must immediately give up his own wishes, if possible, even to express this desire must be suppressed.” “Only learning from rote learning will keep most children in a passive state, because as long as this learning continues, it will mask other thoughts that children may have.”[5] These statements are everywhere. Respect for learners' initiative and personality, if we don't explain them in advance, even if they say that they are from Dewey's mouth, it can be as if. Those being the case, why do people still let Herbart’s theory bear the notoriety of “striking student initiative”? The author believes that this is not the fault of Herbart, but is determined by the specific teaching organization of the class teaching system. The reason why this form of class teaching system can still uphold the teaching organization of the school until today is because it has the unparalleled efficiency of other organizational forms. It is precisely because we have to teach “all knowledge to everyone” in a certain period of time; we will choose the class-based teaching system in such a way. But it is also clear that people have to pay the price of sacrificing children's personality to a certain extent while choosing this kind of teaching

organization. If you really think about adapting to the individuality of children, it may be clear to everyone that individual teaching has its unquestionable superiority. But today, with emphasis on universal education, can we imagine that school education adopts teaching with individual teaching as its main form? I am afraid the answer is self-evident.

#### **4. Third Contribution of Herbart's Teaching Theory: Making It Possible For Normal Students to Master Teaching Knowledge Quickly**

Herbart's teaching thought has also had a profound impact on teacher education. The author believes that Herbart's influence on teacher education can be divided into two aspects to understand.

First, Hexcel's "teaching psychology" advocates the formalization of teacher training. In the ordinary schools in the West before the 18th century, people who had a little through the ink can be teachers, not paying attention to teaching methods, and cannot talk about teaching efficiency. Since Hexcel, teaching not only requires teachers' subject knowledge, but also requires teachers to reasonably impart knowledge and organize teaching to promote the harmonious development of students. As a qualified teacher, you must be trained in education and psychology. In this sense, teacher education was actually produced after the birth of Herbart's teaching theory.

Second, Herbart's teaching theory not only puts higher demands on teachers, but also considers the possibility of meeting such requirements. In fact, Herbart's stage theory of teaching is not only the best way to "learn all knowledge to everyone", but also an effective guarantee for "all education knowledge to all teachers." With the increasing popularity of education, more and more students are entering the school for education, which in turn requires more and more teachers. It is only a good idea to expect all teachers to become educational artists. In the opinion of the author, it is basically impossible. In other words, we can only ask most teachers to become qualified education "workers", and we cannot ask them to become our ideal educators. From this perspective, Dewey's educational thinking clearly puts higher demands on teachers, but it also discourages most teachers. Herbart is not. His theory of teaching stage theory procedures the teaching process, which may lead to mechanization, but it is easily accepted by new teachers because of its operability. Mencius said: "The turn of the smith can be rules and rules, and can't make people clever." ("Mencius • Under the Heart") Perhaps Dewey puts more emphasis on the importance of "making people smart," but this should be based on "rules with people." The author has been engaged in teacher education for a long time and has more contacts with primary and secondary education. One of the problems that current primary and secondary education managers often respond to is that the current graduates of normal colleges and universities generally have a phenomenon that they will not "go to class," and former graduates are much better in this regard. Through vertical comparison, the author finds that the phenomenon they are responding to is precisely the one that has been taught by Dewey in recent years. Of course, this kind of evaluation must have the inconsistency of the primary and secondary education administrators and the current graduates' teaching concepts. However, "the current teacher graduates will not attend classes" is also a fact that is quite embarrassing and must be faced. Does this have a certain relationship with Herbart in the teacher education for some time? The author's answer is yes.

In fact, Dewey's teaching theory sounds very attractive, but its operability has been questioned by people. The general decline in the quality of teaching in primary and secondary schools in the United States in the last century, critics generally believe that Dewey is a criticism of the traditional teaching theory represented by Herbart. In this sense, although we can't say that Herbart's teaching thoughts are perfect, it can be said that it is the most suitable teaching theory for class teaching. If people can't create a new form of teaching organization that can replace the class teaching system, the influence of Herbart's teaching theory and its criticism of it will continue to exist for a long time.

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