

Suhomlinsky's Moral Education Thought and Its Realistic Value Interpretation

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Abstract: Moral education is a theme that spans all ages. Suhomlinsky, a well-known Soviet educational theorist and educational practitioner at home and abroad, has many ideas and statements about moral education. He explored the issue about effectiveness of moral quality cultivation from the perspective of effective teleology theory, effective environment theory and effective activity theory. Today, it is important to reorganize and study Suhomlinsky's exposition on this issue. And it still has practical significance for contemporary moral education. It is mainly reflected in the following aspects. First, we should pay attention to the creation of the educational environment. Good educational environment is the important medium to enlighten students. Then, the critical factor to shape moral educational quality is self-education. Although the formation of moral quality is inseparable from the external environment, it mainly depends on oneself. At last, moral quality cultivation should focus on nurturing the soul.

1. Introduction

Vasily Alexandrovich Suhomlinsky (В·А·Сухомлинский, 1918-1970) is a famous Soviet educational theorist, educational thinker, and educational practitioner in the twentieth century. He is known as "a great master of educational thinking". His works are called "living pedagogy" and "encyclopedia of school life". Today, re-study of Su's educational works and exploration of his moral education thoughts is important and enlightening. In addition to the exploration of moral education and effectiveness of moral quality cultivation still have great value and significance in the networked, diversified, and informational society.

2. Effective Teleology Theory

In Suhomlinsky's view (hereinafter referred to as "Su"), there are many ways to conduct moral education. But in order to achieve the desired educational effect of moral education, it can only be combined with faith education. Because of this "as a morally noble spiritual power, it begins with a belief in sacred things ... Without any belief, there can be no spiritual strength, moral purity, nor heroic spirit ... Those who have faith in the sacred things of our ideology will surely have great talents of love and hate." [1] This means that from Su's perspective, "Students will become good citizens only when they have the pursuit" [1], "Without ambition, there will be no citizen consciousness" [1]. It can be seen that in terms of educational goals, Su advocated that moral education and faith education should be completely consistent. The purpose of moral education is to train "real people" and "capitalized people" to achieve the harmonious development of people. It is also a crucial method to cultivate good citizens for country. To fulfill these purposes of educational thoughts, Su pursued it firmly in his educational practice.

First of all, moral education and faith education play a leading and dominant role in the process of human development. In Su's opinion, belief education is the soul of moral education. The purpose of both is to cultivate good citizens for the country. The cultivation of good citizens must start with the cultivation of citizen's spirit. For example, it is necessary to train students to pay back to the country, society and parents, to cultivate students' willpower, self-esteem and self-confidence in hard work, and to cultivate the good quality of respecting work.

Secondly, when teaching students about faith education and cultivation of moral qualities, it should not be limited by age. Su said: "my educational experience in many years has convinced me

that children are always regarded as children. This is a misfortune of school education, especially family education.”[1] Therefore, he assumed that faith education and moral education must focus on the self-development of students, and the school must communicate with society and families. In his view, “schools and families must act in concert and put forward the same requirements. They also have a similar purpose and hold the same belief. And they always proceed from the same principle. Do not disagree with purpose, process or means of education.”[5] Especially “educators should strive to create students’ acceptance of education and let students understand the happiness and beauty of spiritual life.”[1]

Thirdly, Su claimed that moral education and faith education can promote students’ positive actions. “faith, in terms of its nature, can not be a spiritual wealth that is earned with doing nothing. If beliefs work through active activities, they will be consolidated and become more firm.”[2] So, Su put forward a suggestion that the teachers of the school should arrange time to take the students to “travel”. Moreover, he called on the teachers to take the students to cities, villages, grasslands, the Volga River and the places where the heroes once shed their blood. Its purpose is to “print the surrounding reality in the students’ consciousness, and strive to make their thinking process based on a vivid representation,” thereby “making everyone in the world full of moral wealth from childhood, that is, to live spiritually in our ideology, motherland, history, and people’s world.”[1] Furthermore, in order to better promote the positive actions of students, Su advocated that six educational forces should be used for moral education activities. These six forces are “teacher, family, student, collective, student himself, books, and street friendship [3].”

According to the above exposition, we can find out that Su was very disgusted with the preach on morals on the one hand. Because that is straightforward, blunt, dull, and without emotion. He believed that “do not rush to find something that can be compared between the behavior of the teenager and the behavior of the ideal person in his mind. This approach may lead to completely opposite effects rather than expected [2].” On the other hand, we should advocate that the values of positive publicity in schools should be highly consistent with the mainstream social ideology, which is an effective basis for the importance and possible realization of moral education.

3. Effective Environment Theory

The cultivation of moral quality is accomplished in a certain environment. “The environment infects and nurtures people with its own unique image, making people unconsciously educated and influenced [8].” According to Marx and Engels said, “Man creates the environment, and the environment also creates people.” Su discovered the important effect of environmental education. He holds that if you want to achieve the desired results of education, you must create an educational environment to educate people. Su regarded a good educational environment as not only a precondition for shaping the harmonious development of students’ body and mind, but also a fertile ground for cultivating students’ noble moral sentiments. He thought the educational environment was an indispensable medium for enlightening students. So he tried his best to create an educational environment in school.

Firstly, Su actively created the natural environment of the campus, in order to put the campus environment in the natural environment, so that students can get close to nature and love it in the school, which is the cornerstone of cultivating students’ moral quality. For the sake of letting students personally experience the process of creating the school’s natural environment, Su personally led the students to plant many fruit trees which grown in the Ukrainian region in the campus. For instance, they planted many kinds of trees like apples, pears, plums, apricots, peaches, cherries, walnuts, and so on. This approach really helped students feel the fun of labor, and invisibly shaped the excellent quality of students’ unity and cooperation. They learned how to love labor and cherish the results of labor. What is more, it can achieve the educational purpose of cultivating moral quality.

Secondly, Su actively created a spiritual environment of the campus, the purpose of that is to promote students to have a “rich and multifaceted spiritual life”. Su believed that “the campus should be filled with a bright and moral atmosphere, and this atmosphere makes people believe that

noble moral sentiment will become the mainstream. Where there are many distinctive moral behaviors, good will be a power that can be used to eliminate evil.”[1] In order to create a spiritual environment on campus, Su required that we should make the walls play the “speaking” role when design the classroom layout. And we should provide content of moral education that can be understood by students according to the characteristics of students’ cognitive development. For example, attaching celebrity quotes and portrait photos of heroes on the wall, as well as adding some words with meaning to remind students to think about the heroic deeds. Besides that, we must actively create a reading environment. For example, setting up display racks in the classrooms, corridors, and libraries. In addition to the books on moral education for this grade, there are all the books required for the syllabus and sufficient world literature. The creation of a reading environment can not only help students to understand principles of the world and increase their wisdom, but also invisibly expose students to moral edification. Su also thought a good reading atmosphere can improve students’ ability to perceive beauty, which is of great significance to the formation of students’ good spirit.

Then, Su advocated that the construction of school educational environment should connect with social education resources, especially we should carefully consider connecting the creation of school moral educational environment with social education resources. He encouraged students to get moral experience from their relatives. Another example is that he attached great importance to the educational significance of heroes. He once said to the children: “The older generation can pass everything to you, but no one can replace you to create people, which requires labor. The world seems to be reborn with the birth of everyone. What the world will become is your responsibility.”[1]

In summary, although Su emphasized the unification of school environment and social environment, he paid more attention to the penetration of school environment and social environment in the use of educational resources. And Su also focused on the degree of student participation in the construction of the campus environment. He emphasized that students should actively participate in the creation of the school’s educational environment. It can be found that Su’s implicit moral education philosophy is conducting moral education through the environment. At the same time, Su proposed that the cultivation of moral quality is not based on the nagging moral and political preaching, because of that “good words can not be repeated again and again, otherwise it will become cliché like a stupid tool in a lazy artisan’s hands. If you use this fragile and delicate tool in case of difficulties, it will make great and sacred things become vulgarized.”[3]

4. Effective Activity Theory

Su believed that practical activity was significant for cultivating students’ moral quality. He emphasized the educational activities have great significance, especially the activities that students participate in are crucial to their development. He pointed that the effectiveness of all educational activities base on the realization of students’ activities. In order to realize this educational concept, Su provided a lot of effective activity models in educational practice, such as observation; reading; labor; and dedication. To make the activity more effective, Su emphasized the following things.

At first, teachers should guide students to learn to observe. There are three main forms of observations that Su mentioned here. Students should observe the natural environment, the people and things around them, and world political and social activities. Although the observation methods are different, the purpose is the same, that is, to cultivate good moral qualities of students. When observing the natural environment, “educators should help students listen to music in the natural world of their hometown, the whisper of leaves , the rustle of snowflakes in front of the window and the roar of snowstorms, the gentle patting of waves and the solemn silence at night.”[6] They are helpful for students “to show patriotic emotions in natural scenery in the image memory.” [1] When students observe the people around them, guide students to experience their pain and joy, panic and anxiety. This can be helpful to cultivate their compassion and make them strive to make moral choices according to the human nature. When cultivating students to pay attention to world politics and social activities, teachers are required to guide students to learn thinking from emotional input

to moral judgment. Meanwhile, “an extremely important task for educators is to arouse children’s emotional acuity, attention, and fine feeling.” [1]

Secondly, teachers should guide students to learn to read. For example, in the “Communist Reading Class”, teachers should guide “every student should listen to every word about the motherland intellectually and emotionally and like to read every book and every line of words about the motherland.” [6] It is not enough to just do this. It is also necessary to arouse students’ emotions about the motherland. Not only know and remember some knowledge about the motherland and master some facts and conclusions, but also experience these knowledge from the heart. If students can care about the destiny of the motherland, and read people’s history which is full of heroic spirit with pride, excitement, and admiration, they will grow into good citizens. And moral qualities will spontaneously develop during the reading process.

Thirdly, teachers should guide students how learn to work. Labor and labor classes are a form of moral education activities that Su explored. Su believed that labor as a kind of moral education activity is a form can provide students with a stage for thinking and spiritual exploration. This is the essence of labor activity as a form of moral education activity. That is to say, labor as a form of moral education activity not only can help students to have a real experience of morality, but also can help us to avoid the hollow of moral education. Connecting observation, reading with labor, you will receive more educational effect than desired like “ $1 + 1 > 3$ ”. When students appreciate their labor achievement, such as they see the blooming flowers that they cultivated in the garden, they will have a great enthusiasm to invest in future material and spiritual labor.

Finally, Su emphasized dedication activities. In his view, dedication is “the only school to cultivate people’s lofty aspirations” [1], which is an effective way for young people to improve spirits. Su believed that “teenager’s spirit must be gradually accumulated, starting from childhood and juvenile. A twelve years old person recalls what he had done for others in the past, he should be proud of his labor achievements. This pride is the basis for the teenager to accept communist thoughts and consistent thinking.”[4] Su implemented his educational concept of dedication activities through the traditional festivals such as “Orchard Week”, “First Bunch of Crops Festival”, “New Grain and Bread Festival” and “Summer Mowing Festival” in spring and autumn.

In a word, Su regarded dedication as a beautiful activity in the spiritual world, and he thought this spiritual activity “it can make people become educated people. Conducting moral education to create real people means encouraging people to be a beautiful person.” [1]

5. The Realistic Value of Suhomlinsky’s Moral Education Thought

Rereading Suhomlinsky’s educational works and deeply comprehending the essence of his moral education ideas are helpful to conceive our moral education and practise moral education.

At the beginning of moral education, we should pay attention to the creation of the educational environment. Good educational environment is the crucial medium to enlighten students. It is beneficial for conducting moral education. Creating a harmonious and graceful educational environment is conducive to students’ concordant improvement of mind and body. And it can be helpful to cultivate students’ moral sentiment. If school’s moral education is not consistent with social educational environment and family educational environment, it will become hollow, empty and nonobjective preach. Hence, school’s moral educational environment will be actual and effective when the environment of school connected with social environment and natural environment on their educational influence.

Then, the critical factor to shape moral educational quality is self-education. Although the formation of moral quality is inseparable from the external environment, it mainly depends on oneself. Su encouraged students to actively participate in various labor and activities. There are three educational purposes in it. Promoting students to experience, practice, and cultivate their moral sentiments during the process of activities and labor. As a famous scholar said: “education carried out by all external objects can only be transformed into the educator’s own active activity, that is, the subject’s self-education which is accepted by the subject. So the purposes of education

can be achieved, otherwise, education is meaningless.”[10]

6. Conclusion

Moral quality cultivation should focus on nurturing the soul. Suhomlinsky fully affirmed the role of knowledge education in the cultivation of moral education. He explained and elaborated how to cultivate moral quality through nurturing mind. There are a few reasons why our current moral education is not effective or far from the expected effect. The extremely important reason is simplifying moral education into unidirectional indoctrination. This behavior that ignores the improvement of students' mind results in the ineffective effect. Suhomlinsky put forward that we should care about students' mind and their spiritual world in moral education. Do not simply regard students as vessel or machine for receiving knowledge. This is an important bottleneck that we must break through today.

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