

The enlightenment of Socrates' "art of midwifery" to college education

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Abstract: "Art of midwifery" was a teaching method originally developed by Socrates, who believed that there was truth in every soul, but it could not be revealed because the body was obstructed. Therefore, by talking with the interlocutor during the question-and-answer process, he constantly reveals the contradictions in the conversation of the other party, so that the interlocutor gradually rises from individual perceptual knowledge to universal rational knowledge, and goes further step by step until helping the other party to get the truth. "Art of midwifery" is not only an educational thought, but also a teaching method. It not only has an enlightening influence on the study and growth of contemporary college students, but also has an important enlightening significance on contemporary college education.

Keywords: Socrates; "art of midwifery"; education

1. Introduction

Socrates was a famous philosopher and educator in ancient Greece. He, along with Sakyamuni, Confucius and Jesus, was called the teacher of human beings. He played an important role in the history of western philosophy and even the whole history of human thought. He spent most of his life thinking philosophically. And he formed a unique teaching method - art of midwifery in his long-term teaching practice. This teaching method has important reference significance for contemporary education.

2. The life of Socrates

Socrates was born into an ordinary family in the fifth century BC. His father was a sculptor and his mother was a midwife. Socrates had learned carving from his father, and later became a learned man by self-study. He made a living by passing on knowledge, and in his 30s, he worked as an unpaid teacher without setting up a school. He gathered young people eager to acquire new knowledge to have a dialogue in the square, discuss problems and search for truth and wisdom. His life story was recorded by listeners, students and friends because he wrote nothing himself. His philosophical ideas are elaborated in the works of his students Plato and Xenophon, but since their accounts are often contradictory, it is not easy to study Socrates' philosophy.

Socrates' personality appealed to his contemporaries. They formed a distinct school of thought. He was regarded as the founder of a new philosophy. He is a teacher with a clear mind and a calm heart. His outward banality contradicts the deeply held Greek belief that a beautiful soul exists only in a beautiful body. He talked to people from different walks of life, and in each case he tried to induce the speaker to discover the truth for himself by means of dialogue. After the slave-owner democracy was restored in Athens, Socrates was charged with defying traditional religions, introducing new gods, corrupting youth and opposing democracy, and was sentenced to death. Although his students and friends organized an escape plan, he refused to escape for his own ideals and beliefs. In 399 BC, this philosopher died quietly after drinking a glass of poisoned wine. Until the last day, he continued to have philosophical conversations and reasoning with himself.

Socrates had many crazy followers and a large number of fierce opponents both before and after his death. Although he left no works in his life, his influence was enormous. Philosophers often regard him as a watershed in the history of ancient Greek philosophy, and call the philosophy before him pre-Socratic philosophy. As an outstanding philosopher, Socrates had a great influence on later western

philosophy.

3. The connotation, advantages and disadvantages of “art of midwifery”

The word “midwifery” comes from the Greek word “maieutike”, which means “obstetric art”. Socrates regards “midwifery” as an art of midwifery, which he inherited from his mother, but the difference is that he helped to get rid of not only the burdens of women, but also the burdens of men, which were not children but knowledge.

3.1 The connotation of “art of midwifery”

Socrates’ “art of midwifery” is also called Socratic dialogue. Socrates goes around talking to people. At the beginning of his conversations, he pretends that he knows nothing about the subject and asks for advice from those who are supposed to be wise or who think they are wise. When his interlocutor gives a definition, he will come up with some counterexamples to show that the definition is not appropriate in these cases, so the interlocutor has to revise the definition. Socrates goes on to show that these definitions are still inadequate by giving examples to the contrary, forcing the interlocutor step by step to admit his own ignorance. Then he guides the interlocutor closer and closer to the correct opinion through examples, and develops definitions by induction until the truth is revealed. In the process, he assigned himself a small role, insisting that he himself could not teach anything, but that anyone with his help could produce something of his own.

Socrates’ “art of midwifery” consists of four steps. Its first step is called irony. This part is to expose the contradiction of the other party through dialogue and questioning, so that the other party will give up their original views, fall into a self-contradictory situation, and finally admit their ignorance. The second step is “midwifery”, which means “birth of knowledge”. Socrates called this the “midwife method,” probably because he was the son of a midwife. He believed that the truth was already in a person’s mind, and it was only necessary to extract it from there and help it be born.^[1] By constantly asking questions, he let the other side answer, so that the other side step by step to understand some truth, to obtain some knowledge. The third is “induction”, which is to seek universal things from behind specific and special phenomena and induce universal definitions. The fourth is “summary”, which is the result of question-and-answer and debate. Through the previous several links, it helps the interlocutor to get a precise conceptual understanding, that is, to classify individual things into general concepts and get a general concept about things.

3.2 Advantages of “art of midwifery”

“Art of midwifery” contains rich connotation, it has the following three main advantages: firstly, it is regarded as the earliest sense of “discovery method”. In conversation, Socrates often expressed his views by means of discussion, question-and-answer, conversation, or argument, rather than directly teaching specific knowledge. He first posed questions to the students, and if the students answered wrong, Socrates did not directly point out what was wrong and why, but only put forward suggestive questions to stimulate the students to think, and then together to find the answer to the question. In this sense, “art of midwifery” is the earliest “discovery method”. Secondly, “art of midwifery” can mobilize the subjective initiative of teachers and students. “Art of midwifery” requires students to learn actively and actively, and also requires teachers to guide and assist students. Just like in the process of birth, if only the midwife’s unilateral guidance, or only the maternal force can not successfully land the child. In the same way, in the process of education, no “truth” can be produced without the efforts of either teachers or students. Socrates pointed out that truth is like a child in a mother’s womb, hidden in everyone’s heart, the process of obtaining the truth is the process of truth production. Thirdly, “art of midwifery” can develop students’ potential.^[2] Socrates pointed out that the teacher’s task is not only to spread the truth, but also to be a “midwife” of new ideas. The truth exists in every man, but not every man can find it in himself. The task of a teacher is to help people discover the truth in their hearts, to help people discover their potential abilities.

3.3 Disadvantages of “art of midwifery”

“Art of midwifery” has advantages but also has disadvantages. First of all, it is mechanical and inflexible.^[2] In Socrates’ teaching practice, he always used that set of question-and-answer methods, repeatedly asking questions, ignoring the differences of students, without asking the object, time and

place. And no matter whether the method is appropriate or not, he only emphasizes the process, regardless of the effect. In addition, “art of midwifery” also has a slight tendency to indoctrinate. Although Socrates talks with the interlocutor through questions and hints, it is not difficult to find that he takes the initiative to ask questions and the interlocutor responds passively in this process. It seems that Socrates designed questions and answers in advance and guided the interlocutor to answer the preset answers in Socrates’ mind. It can be said that the interlocutor acknowledges this result under the endless questioning and hints of Socrates. Such questions are not only unenlightening, but also the same as direct indoctrination.

4. The enlightenment of “art of midwifery” to college students’ education

Socrates’ art of midwifery plays a very important role in the history of western education and philosophy. Not only that, in today’s rapid development of economy and science and technology, under the fierce collision of eastern and western educational ideas, the “art of midwifery” created by Socrates also has a very important inspiration for the teaching of contemporary colleges.

4.1 Stimulate students’ subjective initiative and establish the concept of self-education

Socrates called his method midwifery because he emphasized that he was not a producer of knowledge, but only guided the interlocutor’s inherent knowledge,^[3] which fully reflected the idea of self-education of the subject. Self-education is relative to external education. Self-education regards the educated as the subject with independent personality, independent consciousness and choice desire, and it is the self-development of the educated’s subjectivity. External education, on the other hand, takes educators as the center, regards the educated as the object of unconscious enlightenment, and its method focuses on “external irrigation”.^[4] The two educational methods are essentially different. The ultimate goal of education is to stimulate and guide students’ self-development, while the educational method of blindly inculcating knowledge runs counter to it and can only lead to students’ dull thoughts. And under the erosion of this rigid education mode, students will not develop and improve themselves, but will fall into a stagnant state. This shows that stimulating students’ thirst for knowledge and forging their mastery of complex environment cannot be easily achieved by a lot of spoon-feeding. In the educational practice of Socrates, he never imparts knowledge or ability. Instead, through the four steps of “art of midwifery”, he inspires students to think on purpose, to explore the truth step by step, and to achieve development through free imagination and combination of existing experience. College teaching is also a process of thinking collision. In this process, first of all, teachers should choose appropriate education methods according to students’ existing knowledge to stimulate students’ interest in active learning and inquiry. Secondly, teachers should be able to timely throw out questions, stimulate students’ brains, guide students to have a hierarchical, step by step thinking. Thirdly, the teacher should be based on the ability of students, such as the ability to understand and analyze, deductive inductive ability, judgment and reasoning ability, etc., guide students to analyze cases, express their opinions, promote the development of students to the maximum. As college students should have a certain ability of self-study and understanding. Therefore, students can prepare lessons and give lectures, and teachers can supplement and sublimate education, which can deepen students’ understanding of knowledge. Only with the concept of self-education, students can integrate knowledge with practice, rather than simply memorize. In this way, the knowledge students acquire will be more solid and more meaningful.

4.2 Correctly understand the use of “art of midwifery” to avoid teaching mistakes

Socrates’ “art of midwifery” educational thought has been widely used in teaching practice since its establishment, especially in today’s emphasis on enlightening education, there is even a “midwife fever” ethos in classroom. One of the main reasons for this phenomenon is that the teachers’ understanding of “midwifery” is not comprehensive and profound, and only stays in simple imitation, so in this case, classroom questioning unknowingly into the wrong area. Faced with this situation, first of all, we should improve the scientific nature of the problem. Too many questions can bore and scare students. In addition, low quality questions can result in unthought-provoking and uninspiring results. So we should not only pay attention to the quantity of questions, but also pay attention to the quality. In addition, we should also pay attention to the time and occasion of asking questions, avoid not asking questions in the place should be asked or should not ask questions in the phenomenon. Secondly, we should design questions according to the teaching content, and what to ask and how to ask is

determined by the teaching, rather than what we want to ask. If we do not distinguish the teaching content, we will ask questions blindly, which not only fails to achieve the purpose of teaching, but also easy to make students' thinking more confused, and may even be led astray.^[5] Finally, we should pay attention to the proper way to guide students. When students are stuck in front of the question, the teacher should guide students by indirect methods, such as turning the question into a small question that makes it easier for students to understand, or leading students to discuss. Socrates' questioning may force students to admit his point of view, which is not only no different from indoctrination, but also inhibits the development of students' creative thinking.

4.3 Improve teachers' own ability and improve teaching methods

There is a certain relationship between students' weariness and the single education mode. The teaching mode of each college is mostly mechanical teaching and passive learning, ignoring the improvement and innovation of students' education methods, so the education effect is not obvious. Therefore, the contemporary higher education should make some changes, such as the establishment of a variety of rich forms of education, the creation of a variety of educational approaches and methods. Colleges should really infiltrate education into their daily study and life so that students can gradually improve their self-cultivation. As colleges cater to students from different ethnic groups and families, the wide diversity of students' level determines the wide diversity of education content and form. College education can be carried out in a way that accords with students' interests and hobbies, and the diversity of teaching forms can be increased, rather than blindly carrying out indoctrination. For example, use case teaching, network teaching, classroom discussion, individual speech, collective debate, etc., so that students can effectively participate in teaching activities, so that students will have a deeper understanding of theoretical knowledge. In addition, it is essential to combine theoretical knowledge with practice. Colleges have unique environmental advantages, and can use the second class, extracurricular activities and other forms that students can easily accept to carry out infiltration education for students, such as academic lectures, clubs, holiday practice, etc. With the continuous progress and development of society, colleges should change the way of education and strengthen the education of college students with more educational methods, so that it can constantly meet the needs of social development. Under the new situation, it is necessary to change the traditional concept of education limited to classroom and textbook, and make education oriented to society, so that college students can increase knowledge and realize self-development in practice.

4.4 Build a good teacher-student relationship and form effective interactive teaching

Interactive teaching is an activity between teachers and students. Any interactive teaching must be carried out smoothly with the cooperation of teachers and students. In general education, we tend to take the educator as the subject of education, the educated as the object of education, by the educator to instill certain knowledge to the educated, it will be simplified into a single, mechanical process. But in fact, the object of education is different from the general material object. As people with thoughts, feelings and will, they have subjective initiative rather than complete passivity when receiving education. Therefore, education is not a one-way activity, but a process of interaction and integration of various factors, which is very important to guide students to experience feelings in practice, to explore the real knowledge in the society.^[4] Only when the subject and object play the initiative at the same time, education can play the best effect. In addition, the success or failure of a teaching activity depends on many variable and complex factors, because it is human interaction. Therefore, equal and harmonious relationship is the premise of teacher-student communication teaching. Socrates was always a passionate conversationalist. He could argue with anyone in the street, in the marketplace, or anywhere else. He respected people of all walks of life, and anyone could be his student if they wanted to be. He places himself on an equal footing with his interlocutors, often concealing his knowledge in a self-ironic way to show his ignorance in exploring the truth. This approach not only narrows the distance between him and his students, but also stimulates their active thinking. Only on the basis of good teacher-student relationship can teaching proceed smoothly and bring into full play the best effect. Teachers should take the initiative to respect students, treat students as equals, and close the distance between students and teachers. In this atmosphere, students can not only arouse their interest, broaden their mind and better accept new knowledge, but also enable students to analyze, associate and reason on the basis of new knowledge, and carry out creative learning.

5. Conclusions

When the youth are prosperous, the country will be prosperous, and when the youth are strong, the country will be strong. Youth is the future of a nation and the hope of a country. School education undertakes the main work of youth education, which has a long way to go. Nowadays, with the economic globalization and the rapid development of science and technology, education is faced with many challenges. All these put forward new requirements for teachers. Therefore, teachers should not only have solid professional knowledge, but also have superb teaching methods. Practice has proved that the “art of midwifery” created by Socrates has a certain reference effect on today’s teaching.

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