

How to Talk about Education in Some Thoughts Concerning Education

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Abstract: John Locke was a famous British philosopher, statesman and educator in the seventeenth century. His *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* is one of the classic works in the history of foreign education. In this work, Locke not only discussed "education of gentlemen" comprehensively, here "gentlemen" means not the ordinary gentleman, but the political elite. At the same time, he also proposed the idea of establishing a system of "moral, intellectual, and physical education". The purpose of education, the role of education, the contents of education, the ideas of education, and the principles and methods of education, which were covered in this work, had a positive and widespread impact. In this article, we will try to explain how the *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* talks about education from the aspects of educational purpose, educational contents and methods, and the relevance of the *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*.

Keywords: John Locke; *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*; Educational purpose; Educational thought

John Locke (1632-1704) was a famous English philosopher and thinker in the 17th century. *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, a masterpiece of Locke's educational thinking, was published in 1693. The book is divided into three parts, and the middle section, on moral education, is the most central part of the book. The upper part focuses on the recommendations for children's physical health, which are the prerequisites for moral and intellectual education. In this paper, we will elaborate on how deals with education in terms of its purpose, its content and methods, and the relevance of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*.

1. Purpose of Education

The theme of the *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* is "Gentleman's Education," "Our virtue, ability, and learning have made England a nation which the world dare not underestimate, but it would be a mockery if we did not take care and preserve the virtues of purity, rigor, and diligence in the next generation, and expect them to be sufficiently endowed with such virtue, ability, and learning to continue to succeed on the stage of the world."^[1] The word "gentleman" was no ordinary gentleman. He said, "I think a prince, a nobleman, and a common gentleman should be brought up differently from each other."^[2] Locke's list of qualities that a gentleman should have, such as breeding, honesty, wisdom, fortitude, restraint, and learning to be sensible, all point to the political sphere. Therefore, the real target of education in the *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* is not the sons of commoners or ordinary gentlemen, but the political elite.^[3] He wants to cultivate four qualities that only the political elite should possess: virtue, wisdom, education, and learning.

2. Education Content and Methods

The whole book of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* consists of three main parts: health education, moral education, and knowledge and skills education. Locke believes that health education is the most important, and moral education is more important than knowledge and skill education.

2.1 Health Education

Locke opens this section on health education with the famous quote, "A healthy education resides in a healthy body."^[4] He believed that in order to have a happy life one should have good health. To maintain good health, the first step is to start with family as well as practical exercise. In Locke's view, a healthy body cannot be formed in coddling; children must be made to develop a hard-working character in their habits and gradually develop a strong body in their habits and training.

2.2 Moral Education

"A man who has no virtue, no understanding of the world, and no manners, will not be accomplished or valuable anywhere."^[5] Locke believed that upbringing and virtue are the core of elite education and that a true elite leader should possess the four qualities: virtue,

wisdom, upbringing, and learning. The most important thing for a physically healthy person is spiritual health, and this is precisely why moral education is the most central part of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*.

In Locke's view, the principle of moral education that "a man is able to restrain his desires and to follow what reason considers to be the best guidance regardless of his preferences"^[6], to ensure physical vitality is to fulfill the instructions given by the spirit, and intellectual education is only as an important adjunct to moral education, so it is necessary to keep the spirit normal through proper moral education.

2.2.1 Restrain Desire with Reason

He proposes that first of all children should learn to overcome their desires with reason. "The principle of all virtue and superiority lies in the ability to restrain the gratification of desires which reason does not permit"^[7]. Desire is the root of all evil, so if a child is taught early on to overcome pervasive desire with rational thought, he will see self-discipline as a habit in his future life, and this will be very helpful in raising an elite.

2.2.2 Parent-child Relationship Development

It is important to maintain the parent-child relationship with love and friendship. In Locke's view, in the early development of reason in children, parents can take a relatively strict approach to education so that they can learn to control their desires with reason as soon as possible.^[8] Only when there is a stubborn, obstinate temperament in the child's faults can the child be taught by scolding and reprimanding. Children are not born equal, but need to be educated by their parents with authority so that they can develop a sense of virtue and a correct standard of value. In the process of establishing authority, it is important to pay attention to the role of parental example. Children are very good at imitation, and once some bad qualities in parents are imitated, the authority of parents will gradually disappear. Talents rarely emerge under the most severe form of education, so once parents have established their authority, they can rely on love and friendship to maintain and appropriately adjust his virtues as they continue to grow, trying to be their friend and listener and to guide them when they encounter difficulties.

Use more rewards and fewer punishments, and be careful about using corporal punishment. It is better to reward children in a way that gives them a reputation rather than gifts or rewards, so that they do not become overly obsessed with material things. Be careful with corporal punishment. If corporal punishment evokes a sense of fear rather than shame, parental authority is lost among the sticks.

2.2.3 The Importance of Growth Environment

Children are easily influenced by their surroundings. If they are surrounded by good and educated people, they will set a good example for children, while if they are "evil villains" and instill evil thoughts in them every day, they will learn to be bad. It is because of the influence of the environment on children that Locke advocates family education.

2.3 Knowledge and Skills Education

Locke placed knowledge and skills education last because it does not carry as much weight compared to moral education. The purpose of knowledge and skill education is mainly to teach basic knowledge and skills and to develop children's intelligence. In Locke's view, a virtuous person is more valuable than a wise person. For a child with good moral character, teaching knowledge and skills by guiding him with some suitable methods can achieve twice the effect with less effort.

While it is important to learn knowledge and skills, the spiritual elements such as emotions, attitudes and values embedded in the subject are more valuable than scientific and cultural knowledge.^[9] Locke, in this section, has also been emphasizing that of all the knowledge a gentleman needs to acquire, the one most conducive to their daily use will suffice. The fundamental purpose of this knowledge is to improve their moral character.

3. The Relevance of Some Thoughts Concerning Education

Although it has been hundreds of years since the publication of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, the educational philosophies, the practical issues Locke mentioned hundreds of years ago, and the suggestions are still deeply relevant to our education today.

3.1 Implications for Family Education

3.1.1 Parents should Pay Attention to Early Childhood Education

Locke's "blank slate theory" repeatedly emphasizes that life is a blank slate and that education plays a leading role in human growth. He said, "The impressions we get when we are children, even if they are extremely small and even imperceptible, have a very significant and long-lasting impact, as if the source of a river, the water is exceptionally soft, a little human power can affect the flow of the river, and

even make the direction of the river fundamentally change; in short, from the source to guide, the river will accept a different tendency, and finally flow to a very distant places."^[10] At the same time, Locke also believed that children are constantly developing, and that each child has infinite potential. "The mind of a child is similar to the water of the source, and is easily guided; Once you make the decision about how your child will develop, then the child will develop in the direction you specify"^[11].

3.1.2 Parents should both Establish Authority and Respect for Children

Locke emphasizes in the parent-child relationship section that authority should be established when children are young, and that as they grow older, they should continue to use a gentle approach, and when they have the ability to make independent judgments they can slowly communicate with them as friends. The parent-child relationship should be more about guidance and companionship. Long periods of reprimand and scolding will only cause children to become resentful and remain in a state of oppression, preventing healthy growth.

3.1.3 Parents should Focus on the Overall Development of the Child

The most important part of Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* is the section on sports. A healthy body must be accompanied by a healthy soul, and education and virtue are the fundamentals of being a human being. If a person can enrich his knowledge and become wise on the basis of education and virtue, he can be called an elite. The idea of all-round development and the idea that moral education is more important than intellectual education is an important guide for today's family education.

3.1.4 Parents should Encourage the Cultivation of Children's Curiosity

Locke always advocated that children's curiosity is their best motivation to learn. When a child is constantly asking questions, that is when they are thinking. "Whatever questions a child may ask, never stop or shame or expose him to ridicule; you should answer all his questions and explain what he wishes to understand, according to his age and capacity for knowledge, so that he may know as much as possible."^[12] Not only that, but parents should constantly give him a reputation and encourage him to keep asking questions. Children's questioning is a sign of their curiosity, and parents should take advantage of this opportunity to let them learn more and guide them to explore.

3.2 Implications of Teaching

3.2.1 To Teach Children According to Their Abilities and Focus on Their Differences

Locke again illustrates the issue of child differences in his concluding remarks in his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, "Every man's psyche, like his face, has some feature which distinguishes it from others; and we can hardly find two children who can be taught in exactly the same way."^[13] In Locke's view, each child is an individual, and different methods of teaching should be used for different children. In today's teaching teachers need to understand the differences of different children and tailor their teaching to the characteristics of each child, rather than just seeking the same thing.

3.2.2 Teaching should be Step by Step

Locke has always advocated in the section on knowledge and skills that learning knowledge should be done from the shallow to the deep and in a progressive manner. The child should be allowed to gradually accept the simple knowledge and then go deeper and deeper to teach the difficult knowledge to him. This does not undermine children's self-confidence in learning, but is also in line with the characteristics of children's perception of knowledge.

3.2.3 Classroom Questions should be Set in a Hierarchical Manner

Locke has always advocated that in situations where children encounter difficulties, it is not appropriate for teachers to ask questions, but rather to leave them to find solutions to their difficulties or to help them overcome them immediately, rather than reprimanding and complaining. Teachers can diversify the setting of questions to cover different levels of difficulty, so that children at every level can have the opportunity to answer questions and continue to improve their self-confidence in the process of answering questions and making gains in teaching.^[14]

3.2.4 The Classroom should be Full of Interesting and Practical

Locke mentioned that it is enjoyable for children to experience learning through play, and also suggested many actionable ways such as designing games for children to learn through play, and letting children make toys with hands-on experience.

Locke focuses on guiding children to learn practical skills in a relaxed atmosphere. Compared with boring and meaningless teaching knowledge, it is better to let them experience it by themselves. On the contrary, many of our schools and parents still focus on the

transmission of knowledge, and cannot yet get rid of the dilemma that the knowledge taught is disconnected from life.

4. Conclusion

Some Thoughts Concerning Education elaborates on many educational viewpoints and proposes specific strategies around health education, moral education, and knowledge and skills education. Although it has lasted for hundreds of years, *The Some Thoughts Concerning Education* is still a treasure of world culture and education, and many of Locke's educational ideas still have a profound influence on contemporary times, as well as bringing deep thoughts to educators. The classics are gems that have been left behind through the centuries and deserve to be read with reverence!

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