The Nature of Human and the Position of Human Education

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Abstract: *Human beings are the subject and core of education. The current study deepens the understanding of the essence of human being by going back to the classical theories in the history of educational thought to find the multidimensional and comprehensive human attributes. And on this basis, it discusses the essence of education, dissects the presence in education, and contemplates the two-way construction about human beings in education.*

Keywords: Human, Education, Nature, Children.

1. Introduction

Modern pedagogy is people-oriented. On the one hand, as a unique phenomenon of human society, the pursuit and realisation of education can only be carried out on the basis of interpreting and understanding people. Therefore, the question of people is a prerequisite that pedagogy must answer [1]. On the other hand, as an important field of human development, the pursuit and realisation of education is essentially related to the question of people. Therefore, the question of people is also an indispensable core issue in the construction of pedagogy. If we are to truly implement the commonly accepted principles of 'for the individual' and 'based on the individual' in educational practice and research, we cannot avoid, and urgently need to, return to the origin of the individual, discover and explore the attributes of the individual, deepen our understanding of the individual, enrich the image of the individual, and construct the core essence of the individual in the field of pedagogy. At the same time, we should explore the essence of education from the perspective of the individual, enrich our thinking about education, and explore the fundamental characteristics of education as reflected in the dynamic process of development. Furthermore, it analyses the participants in education and considers the two-way construction of the human being in education, so that the focus of education returns to the human being.

2. The Exploration of Human Nature

Ancient and present scholars from the East and the West have studied the essential characteristics of human beings from different disciplines. The current study tries to find a multi-dimensional and comprehensive view of human attributes in the tracing of classical thought and theory, and make a supplementary description.

2.1 Biological and Cultural

Human beings are complex beings with both biological and cultural attributes. Early philosophers distinguished between human beings and animals from the point of view of external form, defining human beings as 'two-legged and hairy' or 'two-legged animals without feathers'. The later philosophers paid attention to the rational qualities of human beings and defined human beings as a special kind of animals with reason. Darwin's theory of biological evolution elucidated the law of development of organisms from lower to higher, from simple to complex, and gave evidence that human beings evolved from extinct ancient apes. The German cultural anthropologist Michael Landmann, on the basis of retrospection of religion, rationality, and biological anthropology, put forward his most representative viewpoints, i.e. the non-specialization of human beings and the existence of human beings as culture. Edgar morin, a famous French thinker, pointed out in his book *The Lost Paradigm: A Study of Human Nature* that the real beginning of human evolution is the transformation from ape-man to homo sapiens, and "culture constitutes an institution that gives preferential treatment to all biological mutations that occur in the complicated direction of the brain" [2]. Chinese scholar Liu Xiaodong innovatively put forward the proposition that human beings possess three kinds of life: vegetative life, animal life, and the unique spiritual life of human beings. Vegetative life manifests itself in the development of various organs and the nervous system; animal life refers to instinctive and unconscious growth; and spiritual life is the growth of consciousness, initiated by cultural creation.

Man is first and foremost a biological being. The development of human genes and body, instincts and unconsciousness follows the laws of nature and fully reflects the will of nature, while the growth of human beings as living beings is a product of evolutionary history, which shows the original nature of life without being subject to scrutiny. Man is also a cultural being. Culture enables human beings to gradually acquire the norms and principles of social life, to build a spiritual world unique to each individual, and to give full play to their potential in a pluralistic manner.

2.2 Naturalness and Sociality

Humans have dual attributes as natural persons and social persons. The image of the natural person already appeared in classical education represented by the three ancient Greek philosophers, and from the 16th to the 19th century it became an important theoretical basis in the educational theories of Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi and others. Comenius linked education with cultivation activities and proposed the principle of 'education conforming to nature'. Rousseau, in particular, made nature the core concept of his educational thinking, believing that human beings are born with the freedom, reason and conscience that constitute the nature of goodness, and therefore should take nature as their teacher,

not people. The idea that 'man is a social being' is contained in the four famous propositions put forward by Landmann in *Philosophical Anthropology*.

It can be seen that the thinking about natural persons and social persons has almost developed together. In fact, this also happens to confirm that human beings have the dual attributes of natural and social beings. Natural beings are the material basis of human existence, which is manifested in various physiological functions. Once a person is born into the world, they have already acquired the status of a natural being, showing a natural state that does not require learning. The social being is the changing state of human beings that is constantly generated through social activities in which they participate. Only by constantly assimilating social culture into oneself in the process of transforming the world and transforming oneself can a person acquire the status of a social being and truly enter human society.

2.3 Individual and Species

Not only does the individual possess his own individual life, but he also possesses the life of the species to which he belongs. The basic idea of biological evolution is that individual development is a simple and rapid re-enactment of the evolutionary history of the species. In terms of the body, the process of embryonic development in humans has gone through stages such as the splitting of the sides, the tail and hair, and the development of the brain from the foetus to childhood, successively going through the stages of the oldest reptilian complex to the maturation of the youngest neocortex. In terms of the spirit, childhood is a period of gradual re-enactment and appropriation of the spiritual and cultural heritage of ancient ancestors. The genetic factors of growth participate in the internal contradictory movement of spiritual growth under the influence of external conditions. And when a child becomes an adult, it means that the human spiritual culture he has re-enacted has evolved to a mature state. For individual human beings, even though the length and strength of life are limited, the efforts made to survive in reality and the pursuit of values will enable individual human lives to constantly transcend the finite and reach the infinite.

3. The Essence of Education in Humanistic Terms

Education is an activity that is unique to human society and aims to cultivate people. Analyzing the essence of education from a human perspective requires a firm focus on the human being as the center, guided by the dual attributes of the human being.

3.1 The Organic System Integrating Nature and Culture

Culture is the sum of the material and spiritual aspects of a country, society, or nation that have been formed and passed down over time. People's behavior in different cultural fields is unique. As the main participant in educational activities, human beings are naturally greatly influenced by culture, which is both the background and material of education. Education, in turn, reflects on, examines, selects, conveys, renews, and creates culture. Therefore, education and culture are interdependent and mutually restrictive. Nature is the gift

that nature gives to mankind. Its content is instinct, the innate forms of the unconscious and conscious, and part of the consciousness, which is also the consciousness that serves as a mirror for the instinct and unconscious [3]. Nature is unexamined and unimproved, so education must respect nature and conform to human nature. Many educators throughout history have discussed the idea of education conforming to nature. Aristotle was the first to propose the principle of education adapting to the natural development of people. Comenius argued for the educational idea of imitating nature from both the laws of development in the natural world and the natural development of people. Rousseau believed that education should conform to nature and follow nature, ultimately returning children to nature. Pestalozzi also proposed the idea of 'self-development of nature'.

Education is the organic system that integrates nature and culture. Culture is the external aspect of education, while nature is the internal aspect; culture is dynamic and changeable in education, while nature is static and eternal. Only when culture and education interact with each other, accomplishing the tasks of reflection and criticism, renewal and creation, can human beings exist healthily and evolve continuously. Only when nature is built into education, and education internalizes nature within itself, does it not only follow the commonality of human physical and mental development, but also adapt to the individual development of each person. Just as a physical object should constantly change itself to adapt to the digestive system and the nutritional needs of humans, humans can gain a broader space for growth.

3.2 The Effective Tool Resolving Personal and Social Conflicts

The fundamental reason for the emergence of education from scratch, from lower to higher levels, is the contradiction between the individual and society. Individual development and social development, individual needs and societal needs are mutually reinforcing and unifying, but there is always a gap between them, which gives rise to new contradictions. Therefore, education is essentially an intermediary system between the individual and society. It is not only a way for the individual to integrate into society and become a member of it, but also a way to transform the needs of social development into the improvement of personal qualities, the realization of personal development and the satisfaction of personal needs, and a way of resolving the contradictions between the individual and society.

Within education, there is also a contradiction between individual development and social development, between the needs of the individual and the needs of society, which is manifested in the contradiction between the individual's demand for multifaceted development and society's demand that education should train individuals for all kinds of single development in order to achieve the multifaceted development of society [4]. As the level of productive forces develops and living conditions become more favorable, human development needs become more diversified in type and higher in level, and education adjusts quantity and quality by expanding popularity, enriching the types of education and enhancing its functions, so as to form a benign structure

between the contradictions of the individual and society.

Education is the effective tool for resolving conflicts between individuals and society. Education belongs to both the individual and society; it is both individualistic and social. Education mediates between the individual and society, seeking to find a balance that meets the needs of contemporary society while also maximizing the needs of the individual, and promoting the common development of both.

3.3 The Complex Process of Bargaining and Compromise

There is a power struggle in education. The spread of various educational ideas and the development of educational movements are essentially contests between educators and thinkers, between educational ideals and educational reality, or between new and old educational ideas. During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period in ancient China, there were many schools of thought. Confucius founded Confucianism and used the three ancient dynasties (i.e. Xia, Shang and Zhou) as models to design an ideal social system. He travelled around the countries to promote his ideas, but the results were not good, so he retreated and set up a private school.

Dewey's educational ideas not only promoted the rise of the progressive education movement in the United States in the late 19th century, but also greatly influenced the New Culture Movement, which was just starting at the time. Lu Xun, Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu and others all attacked the old culture and education. Under the specific background of current events, in order to realize and maintain the self-interests of certain individuals and groups or to maximize the overall interests of the country, education will inevitably be dominated and controlled by external forces in order to achieve their goals. In addition, the constraints imposed on the development of education by the fiscal, household registration and demographic systems all point to the existence of various gaming phenomena in education.

At the same time, however, there are compromises in education. Each force fights for its own interests, while it is impossible to completely disregard the interests of other groups and exclude them. New educational ideals grow out of old ones, and therefore the old ones cannot be rejected in their entirety. It is also a process of constant compromise and balance for educational ideals to be put into practice and for educational realities to be changed. Therefore, education is a complex process of competition and compromise.

4. Two Kinds of People Present in Education

The dual nature of human beings makes education also present the characteristics of dual nature. Education is a system of tools invented by human beings to resolve conflicts, and educational practice and research cannot exist independently of the human factor. Therefore, the attention of education should always be focused on human beings, especially on those who are present in the field of education. The human being in education can be divided into two types: the 'abstract person' and the 'concrete individual'.

4.1 From 'Abstract Person' to 'Concrete Individual'

Important schools of thought and epochal transitions in the history of pedagogical development, both ancient and modern, have been marked by major distinctions and changes in the understanding of the human being. The emergence and development of any kind of educational thought always contains a variety of 'abstract person' in its premise and ideological roots. The so-called 'abstract person' refers to the use of rational thinking to summarize the common essential attributes of human beings, and to highly abstract the people in real life, so as to form a universalized, standardized, and situation-independent image. The descriptions of 'abstract person' vary between the East and the West. Due to the deep influence of Confucianism, the 'abstract person' in China is generally summarized as the 'Jun Zi', i.e., the representative image of a person who focuses on cultivating oneself, cultivating good virtues, and nurturing an ideal personality, as well as focusing on ruling the country, cultivating political virtues, and becoming a ruling talent. In the West, the setting of the 'abstract person' varied in different historical periods, for example, the theological people and the religious people was popular in the Middle Ages. The industrial age of the 18th century witnessed the rise of the political people and the economic people, the embodiment of human power.

In 1970, the French pedagogue Paul Langrand, in his Introduction to Lifelong Education, introduced the concept of the 'concrete individual' as opposed to the 'abstract person', arguing that the real object of education is the whole human being, the human being in all kinds of environments, the human being with all kinds of responsibilities, and the human being in all kinds of situations. It is the human being in all circumstances and with all responsibilities. The UNESCO report then stated: "A particular individual, who is the object of a special education process, is clearly a concrete human being" [5]. The 'concrete individual' is concerned with personal survival, emphasizes interaction with others and the environment, and advocates understanding the world through internal experience to achieve subject-object unity.

4.2 Comparison between 'Abstract Person' and 'Concrete Individual'

'Abstract person' and 'concrete individual' have their own advantages and disadvantages in education, which are applicable to different educational situations and cannot be replaced by each other.

The 'abstract person' contains human commonalities, a mystery explored in almost all humanities disciplines. The process of moving from a partial to a complete self-assumption of the human being, and of moving from a narrow vision to an open one in education, requires a process that takes into account the constraints of the times. Based on the 'abstract person', the objectives, contents, methods and evaluation of education will be placed under a top-level theoretical logic, which will ensure objectivity and standardization and make it easier to operate and more efficient. However, this will also lead to over-emphasis on the uniformity of educational goals and contents, monotonous and rigid educational methods, and results-oriented educational evaluation, which will easily neglect the initiative, differences and creativity of individuals in the educational process, and will fail to satisfy the multiple possibilities of

personal development.

The 'concrete individual' is a more inclusive concept. Human beings exist both in the existing actuality and in the contingency that transcends the existing, and human change and development is actually a process of continuous transcendence, stimulation of potential, and opening up of possibilities. On the basis of the 'concrete individual', educational research focuses on individual lives, the personal feelings and quality of life of students are emphasized, and educational practice is concerned with the differentiation and plurality of human beings, thus reflecting the norms of equity. Education is analogous to planting, but it is also different from planting in that no one knows what kind of flowers or fruits will emerge from the seeds in his or her hands. A focus on the 'concrete individual' in education can lead to the neglect of the ideal personality and can impede the full development of the human being.

4.3 Complementarity of the 'Abstract Person' and the 'Concrete Individual'

The people in education needs to be composed of both the 'abstract person' and the 'concrete individual'. Education should be based on the commonality of human beings, advocating a beautiful and rounded educational ideal, and on the individuality of human beings, carrying out rich and diversified educational activities. Specifically, there are the following suggestions.

First, in educational research and practice, we uphold humanistic care and rational thinking, constantly seeking to find an 'abstract person' that fits the context of the new era, removing outdated and decadent ideas and adding reasonable and innovative content, so that the 'abstract person' as the general direction is more persuasive.

Second, the understanding of 'concrete individual' is constantly deepened in various educational activities. Not only is attention paid to the individual life practices of students and their interactions with the external environment, but in-depth discussions are also held with other educational actors, such as teachers, parents, and administrators, to discover the relationships that constitute them.

Third, education should be viewed from a growing, developing, and innovative perspective, observing the subjective feelings, objective results, and real-life behavior of multiple subjects such as educators, students, and education management in specific educational activities, and analyzing and studying them from a micro perspective.

Fourth, education should actively become an organic system that promotes the harmonious coexistence and joint development of human attributes and individual characteristics, so that each individual not only receives the maximum degree of personalized development, but also integrates into the culture we have created as representatives of the species, bearing the mark of cultural achievement, to touch and challenge the highest limits of the human race.

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