

The Enlightenment of Dewey's Search for "Certainty" to the Contemporary Education System

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ABSTRACT

The search for "certainty" is to keep the focus on the perspective of "uncertainty", so as to remain the contemporary education system in the field of uncertainty. The search for certainty of John Dewey, an American philosopher and educator, is very applicable to the growth and progress of the contemporary education system and can also play a very important guiding role. This paper discusses Dewey's "certainty" from three different perspectives to seek enlightenment for contemporary education system. The first aspect is the reform and evolution of contemporary education system, the second is the continuous innovation of educational concept and the third is to find an "uncertain" space in the whole contemporary education system to experience the constant change of the contemporary education system, so as to optimize the current educational concept step by step, break through the quandary of today's education and make its own glory.

Keywords: educational knowledge system, uncertainty, positive effect

I. INTRODUCTION

In Dewey's "The Quest for Certainty", he talks about the origin of philosophy from the collective affairs of human beings. He first emphasizes that human beings have to seek security because they "live in a dangerous world".¹ It is also derived from the organic combination of whole society and individual feelings. The instinct of seeking benefit and avoiding harm leads people to pay too much attention to "certainty" to avoid many uncertain factors in life and emotion, which is actually a dilemma in traditional philosophy. While modern science and technology impact the traditional philosophy, the attack on the authority of philosophy is increasingly deepened, making the traditional philosophy to a metaphysical road. At the same time, such questions pose a challenge to morality, both directly and indirectly, in educational life. As scholars say, "Since the Renaissance, at least in the first half of the 20th century, everything science did could be summed up in a single word: the pursuit of certainty."² This makes the original educational system and educational concept under attack. To overcome these crises, we must not rest on our own laurels and let the knowledge system stay at one point, but seek an uncertain category in constant change and progress, so as to make continuous progress. Dewey's search for

"certainty" focuses on this point, which enables us to develop our education system in the process of seeking "certainty" and constantly improve the existing educational ideas.

II. THE REFORM AND EVOLUTION OF CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION TOWARDS "UNCERTAINTY"

Throughout the history of human education and knowledge, it is not difficult to find that human education systems are constantly developing and constantly pursuing the perfection of knowledge systems. It can be seen that this is also a development history of "certainty seeking". It is this kind of unremitting search that makes our knowledge system not solidified, not rigid, can be constantly improved and developed, and it is this kind of search for certainty that makes educational knowledge always on the uncertain development path. So we can also see that there is no absolute certainty and uncertainty, and there is a certain proportion of certainty and uncertainty. In the whole educational knowledge system, all knowledge composition and knowledge combination proportion distribution must face the challenge of the times, face the tension and seek such a deepening of knowledge. As the study of educational knowledge becomes more thorough, people tend to find out that the uncertainty is still inevitable. Therefore, it is so important to view this uncertainty dialectically. What education is facing is the uncertainty of knowledge system, and the uncertainty of the times, which determines that the thinking concept of

¹ John F. Dewey. The Quest for Certainty [M]. Trans. Fu Tong Xian, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2005, p. 1.

² Lu Peng. On Uncertainty. Philosophical Researches. No.3, 2006.

seeking uncertainty will make the education system constantly develop and improve. It can also be seen that the educational knowledge system is so complex. The complex system of educational knowledge combines all the theoretical knowledge related to education into a logically balanced system, so that educational theoretical knowledge can be combined according to its properties into a complex system that we can see and understand now. If we are to seek such "certainty" in this huge system, it is necessary to constantly face the test of change, which includes many things, such as the politics, economy, culture and situation of the society at that time. These factors should be taken into consideration in all educational phenomena. But these so-called factors are constantly changing, and the degree of change is also different, which inevitably makes it difficult to predict and determine the law of educational development.

In addition, the object of education is people, each of whom is different. Every educated person has different life experience, different social background and living habits, which makes them different in temperament and character. When education is facing different people, it is impossible to define the relationship between education and each specific person. Therefore, we can see different internal structure systems such as the education system and the education evaluation system designated by the education system, and the education system puts these different systems and evaluation systems into the same knowledge system, which makes the whole education system very complex. What's more, men have their own limitations. Everyone has their characteristics that set them apart from others, so the whole knowledge system is promoted by these different people. Therefore, the educational world of human cognition is developing constantly, and the unrecognized world is broader. People's cognition ability of education develops with the development of the times and the improvement of science and technology. It can be seen that people's cognitive ability to education is very insufficient, which leads to a problem, that is, the whole educational knowledge system has been developing towards "certainty". It is this kind of search for certainty that drives constant development of education. In the development of an era, this search for "certainty" is constantly evolving.

III. EDUCATION GOES DOWN FROM THE ALTAR AND EMBRACES IDEA INNOVATION

Generally speaking, the uncertainty we talk about mainly includes disorder, difference, randomness, fuzziness, instability and unpredictability.³ With the rapid development of contemporary society, the

development of the education system has changed dramatically. In order to meet and adapt to the development of efficiency in contemporary society, education seems to walk into a strange circle. That is the extreme pursuit of efficiency and a rigid model of development. It forces education to go down from the altar and to embrace the idea innovation and development, to get out of the vicious circle. It is not difficult to find that a certain discipline specially strengthens an inherent characteristic of its own specialty and the discipline itself solidifies. Faced with such fixed dogmatic mode, people receiving education have to put on the so-called discipline mask, just like using a mode and an inherent production tool to produce products to complete a series of problems in education. Faced with such a situation, it is necessary to correctly recognize the reality of today and pursue a model of "uncertain". As is known to all, the whole society is a diversified society, and the education system should be a diversified model, instead of a cookie-cutter one. As early as in "The Road to Serfdom", Hayek said that freedom is necessary for humanity (and not just because it is a "luxury", as some people call it), because of the uncertainty of nature and the fact that man must constantly experiment with new ways of life in all directions in order to cope with the unknown disasters and challenges of the future. This proposition has been proved by countless extinct species throughout the history of natural evolution. It is precisely because of this different development which makes our world colorful that the whole human society has developed to the present time. All subjects, all teachers and students should move towards an open academic concept. It is necessary to use this "uncertain" to develop the education career. This does not mean suppressing people's individual personality by completely pursuing the immobilized stereotyped way of education as such practice not only closes the education system, but also solidifies people's thinking concept and impedes the mind and desire of exploring life, which will not promote the improvement and development of the education system. Therefore, people should strive to develop into a well-rounded individual and correctly recognize the innovation of the current educational concept. Thus the concept of contemporary education needs constant innovation. It is such constant innovation that enables the continuous development of education, which is necessary for the progress of our nation and the growth of the next generation. In order to guarantee the continuous innovation of contemporary educational concepts and cope with the uncertain development of the future world, educational concepts must be constantly developed. Only through such continuous development can all individuals develop and innovate, which is also what education should do.

We all see that education is "uncertain" because it is inextricably linked to social and human development,

³ Ding Zuhao, Chen Guangguo. Study on Uncertainty [J]. Qilu Journal, No. 1, 2004.

and that connection is the developmental connection. Social and human development drives the promotion and development of education, and all educational innovation cannot be separated from social development and individual progress. Facing the uncertainty of the world and the evolution of human knowledge, no institution, individual or system can cover all human knowledge and all social information, so the system needs innovation and development to cope with all external changes. This kind of innovation is based on the need of its own system and the inevitable external demand for the development of education system. In addition, everyone has their own unique personality and learning cognitive level differences, so in the teaching process educators will encounter students with a variety of levels and backgrounds, which causes the level inequality of the educated people in education system. This "certainty" would also be possible if everyone were of the same level, has the same temperament and from the same background and has the same inner part. However, if people are all uniform, they cannot develop in all directions and fields, and their ability to adapt to external things will be disturbed to some extent. Therefore, it is not necessarily a good thing for such a group to exist. The progress and development of human beings are precisely because of these differences. If people were identical in every respect, then human beings would inevitably go extinct. It is in the face of so much diversity that the education system has evolved and developed. The development of education system is carried out against the background of the political, economic and cultural development of the entire human race, through the establishment of a variety of communication platforms in writing and media, and plays a certain role in promoting the development of everyone. Therefore, the education system we feel now presents us with a complex, changeable and colorful system. Facing such a system, we should constantly develop and innovate in response to the new external environment.

If the education system is uniform and does not seek development and progress, and the students cultivated are of the same product nature under the same model, the overall human cognition will be simplified to the single dimension mentioned in a philosophy, then the education will be narrower and eventually die out. Therefore, the innovation of education concept must be based on an "uncertain" development path, which will make the education system broader. The educational process itself determines the "uncertainty" of education, and the objects that educators face also make the education system so uncertain. Education plays a vital role in human development. Education exists in our daily life and in every corner of the world we face. It involves the growth and development of everyone. In addition, the innovation of educational concept also

makes our life change a lot. We can feel the whole life change brought by educational change. When we realize this, we will feel the importance of education.

IV. A PROPER PERSPECTIVE ON THE "UNCERTAINTY" OF THE WHOLE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Certainty in the educational system seems to be something that people strive for when we recognize our world and look at everything around us. When generations of people seek this certainty, they tend to miss the right perspective on "uncertainty", which is attacked by some as a negative thing. Of course, this is in the minds of the general people, because it is human nature to seek benefits and avoid risks and pursue safety, perfection and stability, and it is quite normal for the education system to have such thinking concept in the face of such problems. Actually, the pursuit of uncertainty is also a very important part of our entire knowledge system. Facing the "uncertainty" of this situation with the right attitude is exactly what we need to do to properly examine our current situation. The reason why we must correctly examine is that this is the current situation in front of us and we cannot do anything beyond the status quo, including that the education system must be based on the status quo and then establish a goal of seeking "certainty" to develop educational knowledge system. Not only is the current uncertainty not a so-called false cognition, but it is a mirror that correctly reflects the entire current educational situation. Only by examining and facing the situation correctly can we develop our educational career smoothly.

In face of such "uncertainty" in education system, it is necessary to view it in a dialectical way. The uncertainty of educational knowledge system breeds competition in the whole educational system. And it is because of these conflicts that the entire education system has a dynamic force, allowing it not to be stuck in a rut run in cycle repetitively. So it is necessary to face the uncertainty as well as the changing world correctly. The constant change and development of educational knowledge influences the educational system, which develops with the continuous development of educational knowledge. That is to say, in the process of constant enrichment and change in the external world and the internal, educational knowledge changes, and then the educational system is impacted and changed, requiring a new educational system to match accordingly. Mismatch can lead to a phenomenon we see as discordance and requires a breaking-in.

It can be seen that human practice and cognition activities are "embedded in the picture of uncertainty,

and are part of this approach or existence".⁴The whole educational system is a part of people's cognitive activities, which is bound to be a combination of theory and practice. Our educational practice is to explore the education system in creation and exploration, to deal with various problems in education, and to avoid and improve all problems brought by a variety of new knowledge, which is actually a process of seeking certainty. So we always think of education as a discipline where practice and theory coexist. Therefore, it is necessary to develop education concept based on practice, which seem like a body of knowledge that emphasizes theoretical construction on the surface. However, in order to achieve the perfection and development of this theory, we must develop the educational concept back into reality, start from the foundation of education step by step, and then start from the in-depth understanding of the needs of the real society for education. Only in this way can we effectively develop and perfect all kinds of problems in education, avoid and absorb the problems in previous education, and re-examine and test the existing educational knowledge. This kind of exploration is very meaningful. In this search for certainty, the right attitude must be taken whether in a successful or failing experience, or an inappropriate point, because this kind of exploration, success or failure, is a kind of experience and an improvement. No matter from which perspective, it is acceptable, and an affirmation to the development of education. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the theoretical system construction, the correct use of certainty, and the process of uncertainty, which is also very important.

V. CONCLUSION

Throughout the education system, we can use Scott's words: "The world, our world. We should constantly expand the boundaries of knowledge and value, beyond the known nature of practice, to imagine a new and better world."⁵ So uncertainty is inherent in the real world. Since it involves unpredictability and is associated with risk, at the very beginning of human's exploration and transformation of the world in which we exist, there was an interaction of unconscious uncertainty seeking that we have now. Therefore, certainty seeking has always been an indispensable part of philosophical propositions. It is also the improvement and development of natural and social sciences. In the same way, our education system is constantly evolving in this cycle. In the work "The Quest for Certainty" by Mr. Dewey, there is a same emphasis on this concept. He emphasizes the historic

mission of philosophy and natural science through the relationship between knowledge and action, which also has the internal relationship between practice and theory. The book narrates the influence of traditional methods of distinguishing knowledge from action on philosophical concepts, clarifies that science itself is a purposeful way of practical action, and thus shows that the determination of knowledge is a process of constant pursuit.

First, Dewey emphasizes that because human beings "live in a dangerous world, they have to seek security". On this basis, it begins to sort out the track of human's pursuit of certainty, and puts forward the criticism to the traditional philosophy.

Second, the existence of uncertainty has its inevitability. Generally speaking, the uncertainty we talk about mainly includes disorder, difference, randomness, fuzziness, instability and unpredictability. The existence of uncertainty is a necessity in the real world in which human beings live. This necessity is reflected not only in the material world itself as the object, but also in man as the subject. In terms of the relationship between knowledge and action, in his opinion, action is in the first place, after which comes the knowledge, which is in action. Man's activity is the accumulation of "empirical experience", so it has its value and significance as knowledge. This is where his view differs from traditional empiricism.

Speaking of this naturally brings the relationship between certainty and uncertainty which is mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The current society is a society of multi-factor combination development, which is often referred to as the diversified social development model. The feedback of this model will definitely return to the education system, return to the real education career, and have a great impact on the whole education. While the development of certainty in education has always been what we seek, it is precisely because of such many uncertainties that our educational career bears the external impact and is also a kind of development in itself. Therefore, it should be believed that with today's rapid development of science and technology, human's ability to seek certainty will continue to develop and education will also become more and more perfect. Although uncertainties and the imperfections of the education system will be constantly found in the process, the finding of more and more such gaps and inadequacies in education contributes to the improved education system, a better recognized education cause and more reasonable education concept. When promoting the development of human civilization, we can effectively control the uncertainty factors in the process of development. The search for certainty in a changing society has always been a great human endeavor.

⁴ Lu Peng. On Uncertainty. *Philosophical Researches*. No.3, 2006.

⁵ Ilya Prigogine. *The End of Certainty* [M]. Trans. Zhan Min. Shanghai Scientific & Technological Education Publishers, 2009, p. 143.

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