

A Defence of Utilitarian Pedagogy: Whether Education Should Focus More on Human Utilitarianism

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Abstract—The thesis proposes a defence of a late-modern pedagogy which was risen by what Sennet calls the new capitalism, and it has transformed contemporary education tremendously. The term coined for the form under consideration here is ‘utilitarian pedagogy’. Educators and researchers have increasingly debated about complexities of impacting on students’ individual developments and contemporary educational reformation. The author analyzed the characteristics and restrictions in order to conclude the utilitarianism pedagogy’s influence on modern education. Consequences demonstrated a unique lens as the pedagogy could maximize utilitarianism but almost neglected individual all-around developments.

Keywords—*utilitarian pedagogy, utilitarianism, characteristics, restrictions*

I. INTRODUCTION

Educational researchers have interpreted the history of late-modern pedagogy as a heated and incessant debate between two generally controversial views.

In the field of modern education, researchers and teachers hold the dominant perspective that education should concentrate on its instrumental function: education is considered as an indispensable and valuable investment for the people’s development in human capital. Saying it in another way to understand clearly and easily, they treat education as a socializing and functional means of promoting people’s technical skills to realize an economic purpose in the job market. Moreover, a challenged viewpoint is that education is a lifelong and patient process of helping students expand their awareness to those complicated contents of human consciousness and social civilization and assist them to achieve all-round developments both with abundant knowledge in their lifelong careers and abundance of their minds and the souls in this absolutely intricate world. When researchers analyze this second view, education is also seen as a method of obtaining promotion, but it has a completely different emphasis on to reach an end with individuals’ complete development in itself.

This classical struggle has continued for a long time in contemporary era, which is based on an extension of the concept of mutual oppositions—the “theory” and the “practice.” The proponent of “theory”, like Aristotle, convinced that the solid foundation of knowledge could help students possess the sound technical understanding, which resulted in the exceptional practice performance [1]. However,

other educational researchers contended that there was a generally and representatively imperceptible misapprehension in Aristotle’s exposition about the distinction between “theory” and “practice”, which contributed to the pervasive neglect of human’s individual experiences. They expounded that modern ideological trends and pedagogical strategies weakened the significance of “practice”, and these “technical knowledge” was inevitably shaped by the form of knowledge itself. That is, the knowledge could be acquired through the books, in mechanically routine task, with the tedious memory drilling and rote learning. These are typical characteristics of the modern pedagogical culture, which has a tendency to obedience, even fanaticism.

On the other side, the practical knowledge’s acquisition is inextricably related to the teachers who master the intuitive knowledge in their respectively specific fields. The intuitive expertise is strongly linked to the teacher’s chronic experiences and personally subjective feelings or comprehensions, which cannot be acquired in a mechanically training class, just by the rote-learning of a series of nonrepresentational formulas and conceptions or by formalistic memorization and imitation programatically-specified actions and patterns.

The teacher and the student’s interactions in the practical knowledge’s instruction inevitably require them to lay emphasis on both complicated emotional and intellectual interactions. The practical knowledge can never be taught in any normal sense, just by defining a list of ‘key words’ as if they are part of some meaningful vocabulary, or by summarizing a set of “principles” so as to lead students to master the mechanical patterns for rapidly making the adjustment to working on the production lines.

II. UTILITARIAN PEDAGOGY

Utilitarian pedagogy is manifestly partial among contemporary teaching practices in modern education systems. These educators’ imperceptible teaching thoughts and passive classroom interactions conducted in self-regarding social relations that isolate individuals from each other in the classrooms, which propagated the prone to their ego-defensiveness and excessive egomania, even self-constructing egotism.

The massive expansion of utilitarian pedagogy is inseparably intertwined with the dominant culture of individualism and the financial gain actuation. These cultural

elements induced those phenomena of the contending and flourishing curriculums to fade away to propagate their beliefs in the educational institutions and pedagogues should severely constrain the scope of these mainstream curriculums and textbooks. They need strictly accord with economic policies and political situations, and tend to develop the labor workforce that can be efficiently disciplined for fast job adaptation so as to increase productivity as well as boom economy.

III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF UTILITARIAN PEDAGOGY

The core thought that dominates those predominant curriculums and materials is driven by the competitive job market. So there has occurred a widespread phenomenon that teachers' primary task is increasingly tending to evolve into training students' professional accomplishment and technical expertise for a large range of occupations in tight labor markets. For instance, legions of students flock into the classrooms with those seminars like human resource or engineering technology. Teachers have to keep to those educational policies cajoled by politicians and business leaders to design teaching process and compile teaching materials in order to prepare students to be ready for job responsibilities and superiors' instruction against time, but never cared about their own individual developments and personal demands.

Another conspicuous distinction of the utilitarian pedagogy is that 'teaching excellence' is more likely to tend to link with enrolment rate, passing rate, the number of winners in competitions, especially this proposition is reinforced by educational officials who attempt to reward those teachers through public awards to expand the pedagogy's influence. Some governments even established the specialized institutions for the selection and commendation of teaching awards. These praises with the titles like "Excellent teaching award" or "Teaching innovation award" precisely started with good intentions, while eventually could not escape becoming a form of dependency that caters the main education system driven by the booming economy. As a matter of fact, although the instructional modes are reformed and innovated by teachers, the core of the dominant education still revolves around the job requirements and profit-driven. So, as seems likely, teachers' performance should always be shown to be based on utilitarian pedagogy, which also makes a more deep-seated impression to the whole society that the utilitarian pedagogy should have a flourish of trumpets to public for consolidating its leading role in the educational world. Or as commonly stated, we may even regard these awards as an imperceptible way of controlling teachers.

On the other hand, there occurs a miscomprehension and misuse of student evaluation systems that have been off the original faith. Primitively, those educators established the evaluation systems with the intention of helping teachers improve their teaching methods and boost their teaching levels, also helping students check their learning progress and outcomes. However, the systems have turned to another means of controlling and managing teachers, given strong indications that the influence of politics and economics has gradually eroded the systems. An increasing number of researches have already shown for some time now that the pedagogical

outcomes of student evaluation systems are not that objective and effective. Above all, when governments and society have considered the evaluation scores as a crucially determining factor in students' further studies and employment, even about teachers' salary increase and promotion, the educational institutions and teachers are increasingly finding the efficient shortcuts to help students get quick improvements in their examinations, but never care about whether it would do harm to students' personal developments. These convincing evidences have suggested that outstanding scores do not equate to satisfying learning outcomes and penetrating comprehension. Nevertheless, the irresistible force in mainstream social thoughts makes educational managers have to put the scores in the first place other than individual development. In McDonald & Mills's thesis, they indicated: "the original purposes of SET – as an optional tool used by individual academics to help evaluate and then enhance their teaching – have been displaced by its use as a mandatory, managerial procedure for summary purposes such as performance management, accountability and promotion [2]."

In spite of those disputable standpoints about teachers' awards and students' evaluations, it cannot be denied that we have an obligation to be convinced of the significance of teachers' greater recognition and reward, as all teachers need to improve their courses' content and methods of instruction every now and then. But meanwhile, the misunderstanding and misuse of current teaching awards and student evaluation measures still need to be emphasized, and the governments and educational policy makers should devote greater efforts to improving the situation that our teachers are compulsively driven by mechanical instructional procedures and political selection criteria.

IV. THE RESTRICTIONS OF UTILITARIAN PEDAGOGY

A. Performance-centered

A prominent manifestation of utilitarian pedagogy is attaching undue importance to performance results, but losing sight of comprehension in any real sense frequently. The two kinds of feedbacks are not mutually contradictory, remarkable understanding results in consummate performance, and outstanding performance is the direct reflection of true comprehension. But on the account of too much emphasis on performance results, this balancing act is off-kilter, and the former is likely to decrease the efficacy of the latter. Due to the whole education domain are under utilitarian pedagogy ruling, whether teachers or students are giving priority to outcomes of performance. Teachers' pedagogical strategies mainly tend to be engaged primarily in memory drilling and rote learning, instilling reflex responses, routine tasking, and students are blindly compelled to participate in kinds of conditioning and mental programming courses mainly to get skills acquisition and raise scores sharply. What's more, for the reason of college entrance examination, the policy makers and textbook editors are even permitted to monopolize curriculums and textbooks' thoughts and contents that they might title differently but with only one central theme, which may lead to a culture of ideological conformity and centralism so as to consolidate the feudal rule. Performance results are particularly crucial in education, but they should be grounded in understandings of

the theories spontaneously managing those outcomes, rather than just memorizing knowledge points mechanically.

B. Educational Investment Deficit

Utilitarian pedagogy is known as its simple template teaching modes, mistakenly thought to require less in the classrooms, which is especially utilized by self-interest policy-makers who attempt to control education budget [3]. Ironically, policy-makers and educators, even students and parents are completely satisfied with the enviable good grades, everlasting enrollment rates, and high-paying jobs, “so however measurable, provided they are positive at the rate of input-output in a sense [4].” It seems to be a cheaper process of cramming knowledge, although students learning interests might be frittered away. It is considered as an ideal mode of operating production lines efficiently and economies growing booming, though few people care about that children eventually grow into adults like two peas in a pod. Ultimately, it should come as no surprise that utilitarian pedagogy is well received by the ruling class and policy-makers because it accords with their positivist pragmatism of maximizing their benefits.

C. The Overusing of Multimedia Teaching Technologies

With the rapid development of science and technology, various of advanced multimedia teaching techniques are increasingly introduced into the classrooms so that teaching could be delivered through the internet or other multimedia strategies that improve the teaching efficiency and accelerate the teaching process. The increasing number of educators and students has begun to indicate the strengths of the multimedia technologies in most educational contexts, especially in technical and further education [5].

It cannot be denied that the Internet is a highly effective means of getting access to powerful and comprehensive educational resource, such as world-famous universities’ free open courses and academic papers across disciplines. Similarly, we must also acknowledge that multimedia technologies transform the way of delivering knowledge, which might revive students’ learning interests. But what we are worrying is that if we increasingly depend on these things so that we have taken for granted that they could substitute for our dedicated teachers who are capable of providing the efficient interaction and mutual comprehension that always mean whether educating process is conducting well or not.

Nowadays teachers are being required to apply more advanced instructional technologies into teaching practice. Multimedia instruments, like PowerPoint and other coursewares are widely used in the classrooms rather than traditional teaching measures. These coursewares exactly liberate teachers from the convoluted work, but they never change the essence of cramming teaching. For instance, we find more and more exam key points generalized on screens with tedious delivery, and students strive to copy and recite them mechanically and tacitly. As a matter of fact, educators have merely transformed methods of imparting knowledge to students, however, they still persist in the nature of utilitarian pedagogy—rote memorization, leading to a changelessly negative effect on learning outcomes. Massive open online courses make numerous teachers get used to on-line spreading

of main points of the curriculum across different principles [6]. Nevertheless, the more people focus on fast information transmission and sharing, the less they care about veritably teaching arts of lecturing, exploring the unknown, interacting and reacting to students’ issues and judgments immediately.

The more extreme assertion about utilitarian pedagogy is being overly dependent on modern technology, which could gradually lead to the phenomenon of teachers’ role being marginalized in classes, imperceptibly away from their students [7]. In those remote learning centers, students place a higher value on the effectiveness of information transmission and downplay the interactions with teachers, and they will just sit passively receiving and digesting information with places changing from classrooms to other places, like home or libraries [8]. Teaching will no longer represent a particular and valuable form of interaction, and it will eventually become a form of impersonal techno-communicating without thoughts and souls.

No one can deny the fact that we have entered a brand new era of information, and we are also in the Knowledge Economy age. But this socio-economic privileging utilitarian education confuses two basic concepts at the core layer. Firstly, information is equated with knowledge; the second is that educating could be downloading. We should know that spatial distances promptly result in psychological and emotional distances, which weakens the effectiveness and impact of teaching, even blocks them altogether. Moreover, with an enormous influx of information comes to students’ cognition, they are unable to distinguish whether the information is useful or not. And it may lead to the result of people’s unthinking behavioral patterns, estranged and indifferent interpersonal relationship, someone even abandoning themselves to virtual interactions.

V. CONCLUSIONS

If we invariably preserve in cultivating students by means of utilitarian pedagogy throughout our contemporary education systems, we will fear in the face of a future that threatens to see our children will lifelessly go to the work positions on the production lines, dealing with rote repetitions mechanically. It is always true that utilitarian pedagogy is a crash educational pattern of meeting the massive demands of cheap labour force on the production line, but they could hardly make breakthroughs or innovatively solve problems. Also, teachers’ teaching are basically restricted to the prescribed scope that teachers’ teaching freedom are limited and they even could not express their own thoughts sometimes. Furthermore, students are easily impacted by the main idea of utilitarian pedagogy, and treat material satisfactions as their individual core, which make them financially suffer from high debt payments, forced credit downgrade and so on in return.

The defence of utilitarian pedagogy has indicated this cruel reality. Its pool enlightenment of human interactions and recognitions catalyzes egoism and alienation, which lead to the listless thinking and sentimental deficiency that increasingly present to most of modern people.

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