

Article

Shaping Current Teachers with the Concept about Teaching Students in Accordance with Their Aptitude in Confucianism

Yirong Lin ^{1,*}¹ Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, Zhejiang, China

* Correspondence: Yirong Lin, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, Zhejiang, China

Abstract: Confucius is one of the greatest thinkers and educators in ancient China. He was engaged in various educational activities throughout his life. Confucianism, which he founded, is one of the most important philosophical traditions in Chinese history, containing abundant guidance on teaching. Teaching students in accordance with their aptitude is one of these principles. Confucius's principle of teaching students based on their individual abilities remains highly valuable and relevant in modern education. It also has many innovations that are relevant to modern education. In this article, we will analyze how the principle of teaching students according to their aptitude has developed and is shaping current educators, as well as how we should cultivate our morality and competence.

Keywords: Confucianism; students' aptitude; teacher's morality and competence

1. Introduction

Education is an important driving force for the development of human society, and also a key factor for the rise and fall of nations. In Chinese history, Confucianism is an important ideological system that has a profound and lasting impact on Chinese traditional culture and society. Confucianism contains rich and profound educational theories and practical experiences, which provide important references and inspirations for both ancient and modern education in China. Among them, teaching students in accordance with their aptitude is one of the important principles of Confucian teaching, which plays an important role in Chinese education history.

Teaching students in line with their aptitude refers to providing customized, varied, and individualized instruction based on the distinct traits, preferences, potential, and requirements of each student. This principle was first proposed by Confucius and inherited and carried forward by later Confucian scholars. Confucius said: "There are five ways in which the master teaches: he opens up; he closes off; he helps along; he allows to falter; he encourages to flourish." I will not instruct my students until they have really tried hard but failed to understand. If I give them one example and they cannot draw inferences from it, I will stop teaching them. These words demonstrate that Confucius adopted different educational contents, methods, and strategies according to the different levels, situations, and characteristics of students.

In today's society, with the influence of various factors such as scientific and technological progress, economic development, and social change, human society is facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities. In such a complex and changing era, how to cultivate high-quality talents who can adapt to social needs, have innovative spirit, and practical ability has become a major issue facing contemporary education. In this issue, modern teachers, as the main force of talent cultivation, play an irreplaceable role. How modern teachers can draw wisdom and inspiration from the Confucian concept of teaching students according to their aptitude, and how to integrate it with modern educational theory and practice, is an important way to improve educational quality and effectiveness.

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The following three aspects — the definition, the connection between tradition and modernity, and the practical importance — will examine how to apply the principle of teaching students based on their individual abilities in today's educational system.

2. Teaching Students in Accordance with Their Aptitude Concepts

2.1. The Definition of Teaching Students in Accordance with Their Aptitude Concepts

Teaching students in accordance with their aptitude refers to the adoption of different educational content, methods, and strategies according to students' personality, interests, potentials and needs to promote students' all-round development [1]. This concept has the following meanings.

Aptitude refers to students' personality, interests, potentials and needs. These factors determine students' learning motivation, goals, methods and effects, and are also the object and basis of education.

Teaching encompasses the material, approaches, and techniques involved in education. These factors determine the process and outcome of education, and are also the means and methods of education. Also, it is the activities of teachers to teach students' knowledge, ability training, value guidance and other aspects. This is the main body and core of education.

Learning refers to students' activities in accepting, understanding, applying and innovating knowledge, ability and value. This is the object and goal of education.

Teaching students in accordance with their aptitude is to achieve an effective match between teaching and learning, so that each student can get an education suitable for himself, make full use of his own advantages, overcome his own shortcomings, and achieve their own development.

Teaching students based on their individual abilities also reflects a rational and analytical approach, which acknowledges that differences are inherent in all things. It calls for problem-specific analysis and emphasizes that education must be rooted in objective principles [2].

2.2. The Allusion of Teaching Students in Accordance with Their Aptitude Concepts

Teaching students in accordance with their aptitude was not actually proposed by Confucius. It was one of his teaching principles, and was organized by later Confucian scholars into an idea called "teaching students in accordance with their aptitude". It was inherited and carried forward by later scholars.

When Confucius taught his own students, he always found the most proper method for them. For example, when Confucius answered his disciple's question about "Courage", he taught them in the following way: Zilu asked, "Should I take action as soon as I hear a thing that is righteous?" Confucius said: "How can you do it when your father and brother are still alive?" Then, when he was asked by Ran Qiu: "Should I take action as soon as I hear a thing that is righteous?" He answered, "You should do it as soon as you hear it" and after that, when Chi was confused about it and came to ask him about it and said, "I was puzzled, and I ventured to ask why." Confucius said, "Ran Qiu hesitated, so I encouraged him to go ahead. Zilu was brave, so I told him to back off."

Regarding the same question, Confucius said to Zilu that he should discuss it with his father and brother, and to Ran Qiu that he should do so immediately. Confucius's answers were tailored to each student's circumstances, and it was the model of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. This was also the most effective and successful method of teaching.

2.3. The Principle of Teaching Students in Accordance with Their Aptitude Concepts

As a Confucian teaching principle, teaching students in accordance with their aptitude is still of great significance in modern education. It mainly includes the following principles [3].

First, the principle of humanism. This is the most basic and core principle of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. It is also the most important and distinctive feature of Confucianism. It emphasizes being people-oriented, respecting human nature, paying attention to personality and cultivating talents. It requires us to regard each student as an independent and complete person, to respect each student's personality, interests, potential and needs, and to pay attention to each student's growth, development and happiness.

Second, the principle of difference. This is the most concrete and practical principle of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. It is also the most critical and pressing principle of modern education. It emphasizes recognizing differences, respecting them, adapting to them, and promoting them. It requires us to recognize that each student is a unique individual with his or her own strengths and weaknesses, pace and style, and goals and expectations.

Last but not least, the principle of adaptation. This is both the most adaptable and effective principle of teaching students according to their abilities, as well as the most challenging and crucial principle in contemporary education. It emphasizes that we should adapt to different times, environments, and individuals. Education should be based on ability, and actions should be tailored to the situation and desired effect. It requires us to choose appropriate educational content, methods and strategies, adjust educational progress, difficulty and evaluation, and realize the individuation, diversification and flexibility of education.

3. The Link between the Past and the Present and between the West and East

3.1. Similarities: Impart and Inherit

As a key idea from Confucius that continues to resonate in the present day, the approach to teaching students based on their individual aptitudes draws heavily from traditional wisdom. Many excellent ideas have also been developed in the West, influencing modern educational practices [4].

There are four main similarities between ancient and modern approaches.

First, both in ancient and modern times, individualized education emphasizes tailoring educational content and methods to each student's unique conditions and strengths, so that students can showcase their talents and develop their full potential.

Second, both approaches value heuristic teaching methods that stimulate students' enthusiasm and initiative, guide them to discover and solve problems independently, and cultivate their ability to think critically and innovate.

Third, they all advocate the close integration of learning and thinking, attach importance to the study of classics and traditions, and attach importance to thinking about reality and innovation, so as to realize the application and creation of knowledge.

Last, both ancient and modern perspectives recognize that teaching and learning are mutually reinforcing processes. Teachers should not only impart knowledge, but also identify their own shortcomings during teaching, enhancing their knowledge base through ongoing learning and reflection. Students, in turn, should not passively receive information, but actively engage in thinking under their teachers' guidance, constantly strengthening weak areas in their understanding.

There are also notable similarities between Eastern and Western educational traditions.

Among them, three stand out.

First, both recognize that teaching according to students' aptitude is an effective educational principle that respects individual differences, supports students' all-round development, and improves the quality and effectiveness of teaching.

Second, the right to equal education has been widely protected through legislation across both Eastern and Western societies, and compulsory education systems have been

introduced to ensure that all citizens have access to fundamental educational opportunities.

Last, both emphasize the cultivation of students' innovative abilities and comprehensive competence by offering diverse curricula, encouraging interdisciplinary exploration, and promoting the use of knowledge to create value.

3.2. Differences: Innovation and Development under the Differences of Times and Cultures

With the advancement of society and education, several important innovations have emerged.

Compared to ancient times, when education was largely reserved for a small group of scholars or individuals preparing for the imperial examination, access to learning was highly restricted. Ordinary people — especially women and other historically marginalized groups — faced significant barriers to educational opportunities and resources. This led to widespread inequality in education.

In contrast, modern education systems implement compulsory schooling, ensuring that every citizen has both the right and the obligation to receive basic education. Today, people of all genders, income levels, and geographic locations — whether from urban or rural areas — can enjoy equal access to educational opportunities and resources. This has significantly improved the general cultural literacy and foundational skills of the population.

In ancient times, education was primarily centered around Confucian classics and was limited in its acceptance of alternative schools of thought. As a result, educational approaches became relatively uniform and rigid, which hindered the renewal and diversification of knowledge.

In contrast, modern education systems offer a wide range of courses and majors across fields such as the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, engineering, and more. These diverse offerings aim to meet the varied interests and needs of students while also promoting knowledge exchange and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration.

Third, ancient education methods did not have access to modern scientific and technological means such as information technology and artificial intelligence. Educational resources and forms were relatively limited and fixed; educational coverage and influence were relatively constrained, and educational efficiency and quality were comparatively low [5]. Modern education methods leverage scientific and technological means such as information technology and artificial intelligence to enrich educational resources and forms, expand the coverage and influence of education, improve educational efficiency and quality, realize online and offline integrated teaching, and achieve the organic combination of large-scale teaching and personalized training [6].

When comparing it to Western culture, there are two main differences.

Chinese culture emphasizes values such as collectivism, modesty, harmony, and etiquette, while Western culture emphasizes individualism, self-confidence, competition, and freedom. These differences are also reflected in educational goals: Chinese education is more inclined to cultivate socially responsible and law-abiding citizens who value collective well-being, while Western education tends to foster independent, autonomous, and responsible individuals.

Chinese and Western cultures also have different historical backgrounds. Chinese culture, influenced by Confucianism, values classical learning and traditions, respects teachers, and emphasizes authority and hierarchical roles in the teacher-student relationship. Western culture, shaped by the Enlightenment and democratic ideals, values practicality and innovation, respects students' choices and opinions, and promotes equality and open communication between teachers and students.

4. Practical Significance in Modern Education

4.1. *Focusing on the Cultivating Teacher's Morality and Competence*

For instructors, adapting teaching to students' individual aptitudes can boost their professional competence, instructional skills, and promote continuous learning and innovation.

It requires teachers to deeply understand and respect the individual differences of students, and design teaching objectives, content, methods, and evaluation in a way that aligns with students' needs and abilities.

Based on the traits and needs of different students, educators should inspire students' enthusiasm and initiative, while also fostering their interest and unlocking their full potential.

This requires teachers to have strong abilities in observation, analysis, judgment, and organization. Additionally, teachers must constantly update their knowledge, master new skills, expand their horizons, enhance their professional skills, and achieve personal growth and development.

4.2. *Focusing on How Teachers Stimulate Students' Potential*

For students, teachers can meet the individual needs and promote students' all-round development and lifelong learning. Teaching students in accordance with their aptitude can allow teachers to make each student get an education suitable for themselves, whether it is an excellent student or a struggling learner. Students can be developed and exercised in the areas they are good at or interested in, and they can also get help and guidance in their weak or confused aspects. This can not only enhance students' self-confidence and self-esteem, but also cultivate students' autonomy and innovation, so that each student can find their own development path in the diversified curriculum and form lifelong learning habits and abilities.

4.3. *Focusing on the Significance to National Education*

For the national education system, tailoring teaching to students' individual aptitudes can boost the overall quality and efficiency of education, while promoting greater equality and diversity across the nation's educational landscape. It can fully mobilize the enthusiasm and initiative of all types of schools and teachers at all levels, encourage them to formulate reasonable talent training goals and programs according to the actual situation of their own schools and students in their own areas, carry out distinctive and high-level educational activities, and improve the quality of education in all schools and classes in across different regions. At the same time, teaching according to aptitude can also fully respect the cultural traditions and value orientation of all regions, ethnic groups, strata and groups, guarantee their right to enjoy basic education and development opportunities, promote the cultivation and emergence of talents of different types, levels and fields, and provide strong human resource support for socio-economic and cultural development.

5. Conclusion

Confucius and scholars from past dynasties, based on their own educational experiences, provided a theoretical explanation and reflection on teaching students according to their abilities, showcasing its adaptability, diversity, and effectiveness in practice. They believe that teaching students in accordance with their aptitude is in line with the principles of human nature, human feelings, and embodies the principles of educational equity, respect for differences, the cultivation of personality, and the promotion of development. To continue its positive function, we also need to adjust the approach to students according to the background of the times, social environment, cultural tradition, and other factors. and continue innovating as times develop.

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