

# “How” and “What” in Education

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## Abstract

The following is a summary of a lecture on the relationship between method and philosophy in education, which was given at Hainan Normal University in China in March 2011. In conclusion, I'd like to make following clear, behind each educational method is the different philosophy about human nature.

### “How” and “What” in education

Today I would like to talk about the relationship between method and philosophy in education. On January 1, 2011, Asahi Newspaper, a leading Japanese newspaper, ran a front-page article about education. The article stated that, according to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA, Japan was once a global leader. However, in 2009, Shanghai moved to the top spot. The editorial pointed out the urgent need for improvement in Japanese education. But how should education be changed? The article proposed a switch from “injective-type” education to “interactive education”.

In injective education, the teacher provides knowledge and the student memorizes knowledge in a one-sided manner. In this type of teaching, the teacher lectures the class without participation from students, so it can also be called the “monologue type”. In contrast, there is another type of education that aims to solve problems through interaction among students or between students and teachers. This is called the “dialogue type” or “interactive type”. The article I mentioned earlier called for a conversion from the injective type to the interactive type. Because you are all students of the history of education, you have probably heard suggestions like this before. You also know, then, that there have been two schools of education since ancient times. Originally, in the 4th century B.C., philosophers in Athens called sophists used an injective teaching style. Socrates (B.C. 470-B.C. 399, Greek) strongly criticized this method of education. He valued a more interactive approach, that is — the Q&A format called “the Socratic method”.

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## After World War II

During the American occupation following World War II, education in Japan was strongly influenced by the United States, particularly by the American philosopher Dewey, J. (1859-1952). Dewey established an education method called “Problem-solving-learning”, which emphasized the importance of students acquiring the power to solve problems by themselves. Dewey’s method is similar to Socrates’. However, many in Japan criticized Dewey’s method for not increasing the amount of knowledge provided to students, and the traditional injective type of education began to see a revival about 50 years ago.

As a result, the amount of knowledge taught to students in Japan increased. The contents of education contents also became more diverse. The class went faster. This was referred to as “Shinkansen education”. “Shinkansen” is the name for very fast express trains in Japan. In addition, a large amount of homework was given to the students, increasing their study time at home. Today’s situation in China seems to closely resemble this period in Japan, don’t you think? In Japan, many students who could not catch up with the education system dropped out. They were called “ochikobore”, which means “having behind”. Some ochikobore became truant (did not attending school), while others began to behave violently to teachers or other students. This became a serious social problem that received a lot of negative attention from the media.

To address this problem, the Ministry of Education reduced the amount of learning contents and the number of lesson hours. Then, about 10 years ago, a five day per week system was implemented. This is called “relaxed education”. At first, the media greatly welcomed these changes. But before long, a decline in the academic ability of Japanese students became apparent, and Japan’s PISA rank began to fall. Thus, academic ability again became a primary concern of policy makers. If you’re thinking that history began to repeat itself, you’re right. But if you look closely, you’ll find that this time was different. Injective-type education used to be thought of as expanding students’ knowledge and helping them to develop a way of thinking. Today, however, the interactive type is considered to provide more knowledge than the injective type, because students can obtain knowledge not only at school but through the internet and so on. Also, interactive classes are more fun for students because they can participate in the class, which helps their interests to grow. If students can have fun at school and develop interests, they will be able to obtain more knowledge naturally.

As an example, I’d like to use a short group activity. Let’s consider the statement, “In China, women are more independent than men”. If you agree, please raise your hand. Who disagrees? Please raise your hand. Those who agreed, please gather together and make a small group. People who disagreed, do the same. Then, please discuss your feelings about why women in China are more independent or not. Next, discuss the question with the other group. After your discussions, some people may change their answer. Finally, on a different day, please open the question again and discuss it from the beginning. I suppose that you will surely consider various things in order to come to

your final opinion. Or, you may try to understand others' opinions. The person who is interested in this theme may compare with the relations between men and women of other countries or time periods. If the activity is fun and interesting, everyone will participate actively and obtain more knowledge.

At the beginning of the presentation, I introduced two educational methods, the injective type and the interactive type. Now, I'd like to talk about two Japanese nursery songs that symbolize these two methods. They are "Sparrow's school" and "Killifish's school". Both of these songs are very famous among Japanese students. However, few people actually think about what these songs are about. "Sparrow's school" contains the phrase "むちをふりふり", which means "The teacher is whipping". The song goes, "The teacher teaches flipping a whip." This represents injective learning. On the other hand, "Killifish's school" contains the phrase "誰が生徒で先生か、みんなでお遊戯しているよ", which means "We don't know who's a student and who's a teacher. They all get along together." This represents interactive learning. Isn't it interesting that these two children's songs can symbolize the two educational methods?

So far, I have explained the methods of education. But is that really enough in the academic study of education? Another point of view is necessary for academic study. This is the point of view of "What", not "How". This is a view of what education actually is. The viewpoints of how to educate and what education is are like the two wheels of a bicycle. In other words, academic study can't get rolling unless method and philosophy come together. To be exact, education is the starting point, and after that, the "How" is determined. "What" precedes "How". Philosophy precedes method. But there are few people discussing the educational method using this principle. Many people are interested in the methods and tend to compare superficial things such as the inferiority or superiority of certain methods. Can this be said to be academic study? I argue that it cannot. What is education? There are many definitions of education, and all of the various opinions cannot possibly be unified. But, for example, if education is defined as the formation of human beings, would anyone object? I would guess not, because this is a common definition of education. So, for now, we will define education as the formation of human beings. Then, how should we think about human beings and human nature? Educational philosophy changes according to how you define a human being.

### **What is human nature?**

The philosopher who first recorded thoughts on this topic was Mencius (B.C. 400?, China), one of the ancient world's greatest philosophers. Another great Chinese philosopher was Xunzi (B.C. 298?-B.C. 238?, China). They lived around the same time as Socrates. Xunzi regarded human nature as basically evil or bad. I will refer to this ethical view that human nature is fundamentally evil as TYPE I. The method of education changes according to how we view human nature. According to the TYPE I view,

human nature is inherently evil, so it must be improved by education. Education thus takes on a positive role with the teacher at the center. Textbooks for this type of education are edited systematically. This ends up being the injective type. Do you understand what is ahead? Well, this view requires to people to be educated to become good. In this view, there are two ideas of what a “good state” represents. The type that asks for an “ideal” form is “Idealism”. The educational views of Plato (B.C. 427-B.C. 347, Greek) and Kant (1724-1804, Germany) might be included in this type. Plato said that education is like a dye used to change the color of cloth.

There other idea equates the “realistic merits” with a “good state”. This is the viewpoint that emphasizes teaching useful knowledge and culture in society. It is called “Realism”. This idea has been the most common throughout the world since ancient times. Sophists of Athens embodied this idea. Even now, we can say that it is still the most common type in the world. For instance, this idea regards a strong soldier, a merchant who has superior math skills, or a man who follows orders faithfully as “good”. The British philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) assumed basic human nature to be “tabla rasa”. He insisted that the purpose of education was to write down useful knowledge on blank paper (meaning the human mind). In this sense, we may include Locke’s view in the ethical view that human nature is basically evil, namely TYPE I.

#### **How did Mencius think?**

Mencius thought true human nature to be basically good. I call this view of human nature TYPE II. Because human nature is basically good according to this view, education doesn’t become positive. It is not a one-sided education centered around the teacher, but is rather centered around the student. The spontaneity of the student is valued. Developing the power to solve a problem focusing on dialogue is emphasized over information from textbooks. Socrates of Athens embodied this idea. Rousseau (1712-1778) in France expressed this position most clearly. He insisted, “A man is good entirely when it comes out of the hand of the Creator.” He called his education “negative education”. Because true human nature is inherently good, education should be not positive but negative. This TYPE II concept has come into conflict with the TYPE I idea throughout history. The famous educators Pestalozzi (1746-1827, Switzerland) and Ellen Key (1849-1926, Sweden) also are involved in this approach.

Where do you stand? Some of you will choose TYPE I. Those people think that if knowledge does not increase systematically, creativity cannot develop. Others will choose TYPE II. What did Mencius think? If creativity can be developed, knowledge will also increase naturally. There are merits and demerits to both sides.



### **A big dispute**

About 130 years ago, there was a big dispute regarding modern Japanese education. One proponent was Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901), and the opponent was Mori Arinori (1847-1889). Mori became the first Minister of Education after the dispute. Fukuzawa, one of the most enlightened people in Japan at the time, founded Keio University. Fukuzawa and Mori examined in detail the situation of education in both Europe and America and discussed how to approach modern Japanese education. They agreed that education was the most important step in Japan's development and independence. Mori regarded education as a means for the development of the country—in other words, that education exists for the nation. This is called a “nationalistic educational view”. Mori thought that education should enrich and strengthen the country and promote its industry. He placed particular emphasis on teacher education. It was a normal school system. Of course, the education method became was TYPE I.

On the other hand, Fukuzawa thought that, first of all, individual independence was the most important for the country's independence and development. If every citizen did not have an independent spirit, he thought there could be no independence of the country. He insisted that it was education that brought up the independent spirit of citizens. Later, Fukuzawa criticized the word education. He used the word “growth” instead. This was obviously TYPE II. I call Fukuzawa's idea of education the “Democratic educational view”. Mori gave priority to the nation, while Fukuzawa gave priority to the citizen. Mori's idea resulted in the creation of a public school center. In Fukuzawa's idea, education needed to keep a distance from politics. So, Fukuzawa recommended a private school. Japanese education has advanced along Mori's idea up to the present. But ideas like Fukuzawa's often appear in history, such as during resistance movements. This gives TYPE I ideas the stimulus to improve.

### **Which type will you choose in the future?**

A moment ago, I said that an educational method has an education philosophy behind it.

We tend to concentrate on the method. But if we do not understand that a human view is the base for the method, it tends to result in a journalistic point of view rather than an academic one. Which type you choose depends not on the method itself but the struggle between differing views of human nature. To conclude, a human view leads educational philosophy and the educational method. It may be said that the choice of the educational method without a background of educational philosophy is superficial. TYPE I is a method based on the ethical view that human nature is basically evil. TYPE II is a method to be based on the ethical view that human nature is basically good. There may be those who stand in the middle ground between TYPE I and TYPE II. They may think the merits of both

should be taken advantage of. This “mixed type” has merits as well. Let’s call this TYPE III. I also call this type “the hybrid type”, named after hybrid cars. Do you know about hybrid cars? They can use electricity or gas depending on the situation. In education, for example, in the elementary course, TYPE I is performed thoroughly. Then, in secondary school, TYPE II takes over. Or, the reverse might be true. Or one subject (for example English) might use TYPE I while another uses TYPE II. Then where does TYPE III come in? Human nature is both evil and good. Are people monsters?

People who hold a TYPE III view need to have a different view of humanity. Well, what is the TYPE III view? I suppose it is the view that human nature has a desire to improve itself for the better. I think that true human nature is neither good nor bad but “a growth drive” for self improvement. We can find a similar idea (about “growth drive”) in the theory of the famous American psychologists Maslow, A.H.(1908-1970) and Rogers, C. (1902-1987). First, human nature was thought to be evil. Next, the opposite opinion, that human nature is good, emerged. TYPE III is not the one that split the difference on the same horizon. I regard the view that nature is “a growth drive” toward the good as a synthesis that sublimated (*aufheben* in German) two views.

In TYPE I, good is determined from the outside. And knowledge is provided so that it may go forward to the fixed good. TYPE II is a criticism of TYPE I. TYPE II is the theory that there is good in each individual. Therefore, it criticizes education for the outer good, because human nature is already inherently good. So TYPE II results in “negative education”. Depending the case, education should be the least amount. In TYPE III, good is regarded not as something decided from the outside but something that each person is looking for. Teachers provide education in order to help realize each student’s potential for good. They don’t consider this “good” to be a fixed thing. Each student’s good is caught as what is being formed in the future by each student. This idea was proposed by Dewey (1859-1952, the US) as well. Teachers do not care so much about the particulars of where each student’s “good” ends up. But they assist students as hard as possible to realize this potential. Therefore, the education becomes not negative but positive, because human nature is constantly trying to improve and progress naturally.

“Good” is therefore not fixed but is ongoing. And human nature is thought to be “a growth drive” to the good. The first philosopher to clearly propose this theory was Ph.D. Murai Minoru(1922-) at Keio University. In this concept, let’s review educational thought once again. The practices of Socrates, Dewey and Fukuzawa would be included in this type. It is my theme to consider education from this viewpoint.

*Once a man watched the moon at night.*

*He wished he could fly to the moon someday.*

*And he did achieve it.*

*Why could he do it?*

*Because a man has a desire to improve and progress, that is, he has a growth drive to the good.*

Those who embody TYPE III think about human nature in this way.

**Time is running out.**

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair said, “My first political priority is education, the second is education, and the third is education”. Education is the most valuable work. At no time is education not important. Most of you will concern yourself with education in the future. I suggest that you draw a big picture of education, and in this picture, find your standpoint. Today, I introduced some new educational views. It is not important to decide which is correct. The point I’d like to concentrate on is not to gain the correct answer but to continue discussion. In the end, discussion is all that matters. I am confident that this discussion will lead to a better society and make the world a better place. When you do find your standpoint, I will be delighted if today’s lecture provided you with any help on the way.

