

# Comenius on Education Punishment\*

Li Xinrui, Xiao Jumei

Huzhou Normal University, Zhejiang, China

In modern primary and secondary education, there are still some problems in educational punishment, such as confusion of concepts and arbitrary punishment. Comenius expounded his views on education punishment in his great teaching theory, and pointed out that the significance of education punishment is to prevent students from making the same mistakes again and to establish their correct character. Based on this, Comenius proposed that teachers should make clear the school discipline, distinguish the nature of mistakes, and set an example of imitation, which has important reference significance for modern primary and secondary education.

*Keywords:* education punishment, Comenius, reasonable punishment

## Introduction

At present, the Ministry of Education still has no clear definition of the means of punishment for teachers. The ambiguity of teachers' rights leads to some deviation in teaching. We can get some inspiration by referring to the discussion of education punishment in Comenius' great teaching theory and combining with the specific teaching situation.

## The Meaning of Education Punishment

In 1632, Comenius published the great teaching theory, which comprehensively expounded the basic problems of teaching purpose, content, principle, method, and organization form (Wang, 2009, p. 8). Among them, Comenius in "on school discipline" chapter elaborated the relationship between school discipline, mistakes, and punishment, and showed his views on education and punishment. This has an important reference value for modern primary and secondary education. Education punishment is a kind of educational means that makes the violators reflect and introspect, and then realize their own faults and consciously make efforts to correct them without damaging the physical and mental health of the educated (Jiang, 2012, p. 115). It is not difficult to see that education punishment, as a reasonable teaching method, can promote the development of

---

\***Acknowledgements:** This paper is a general project of pedagogy of national social science foundation, namely, "Research on Central Education Administration in the early period of the Republic of China from the perspective of econometric analysis" (Fund Project No. BOA180050), the project of policy and regulation department of the Ministry of Education "Research on the development, practice and historical influence of the party's education theory from 1921 to 1949" (Fund Project No.: JYBZFS2019112), and "Zhao Ting's thought and practice of primary school education" in 2020 Practical Research (Fund Project No.: 2020SCG032), the research project of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zhejiang Huzhou Normal University in 2019 "modern Chinese teaching theory scholars group research" (Fund Project No. 2019SKYY09), the Education and Teaching Reform Research Project of Huzhou Normal University in 2019, "Research on Bilingual Teaching Reform of Chinese history, culture and education" (Fund Project No. JGJX1910), and the party construction and ideological and political work of Huzhou Normal University in 2019. He made the research project "Research on the inheritance and development of modern higher normal education of the thought of 'Ming Ti Da Yong'".

Li Xinrui, undergraduate student, School of Teacher Education, Huzhou Normal University.

Xiao Jumei, Dr., associate professor, Teacher Education College, Huzhou Normal University.

discipline offenders by stimulating their inner reflection. However, there are still some problems in the process of education and punishment.

### **Some Teachers Equate Educational Punishment With Corporal Punishment**

Corporal punishment refers to imposing punishment to make students feel pain physically and mentally, so as to avoid pain and correct mistakes (Lao & Zheng, 1997, p. 268). It can be found that both educational punishment and corporal punishment have the purpose of making students correct their mistakes, but the process is quite different. The process of education punishment focuses on arousing students to understand their own mistakes, which is a process of spontaneous introspection. While in the process of corporal punishment, students' physical and mental health will be damaged, which is a process of compulsory transformation. For students, their physical and mental development is not yet sound. Corporal punishment will make their values distorted, not conducive to the growth of students. Therefore, in 2019, the Ministry of Education made it clear in the implementation of education disciplinary rules for primary and secondary school teachers (draft for comments) that education punishment is a necessary means and legal authority for teachers to perform their education and teaching responsibilities. At the same time, corporal punishment of students is listed as a prohibited situation in the process of education (Ministry of Education, 2019). This also shows that education punishment needs to be clearly defined, so as to protect the rights of teachers and students as a legal means of teaching.

### **Some Teachers Still Have the Problem of Arbitrary Punishment**

Arbitrary punishment includes two aspects: One is "excessive abuse" of punishment; and the other is "abandoning but not using it" (Li, 2017). Today's network is more and more developed, sometimes you can see the news that teachers beat students. On the one hand, it exposes the problem of "excessive abuse" in teacher education. On the other hand, it makes the relationship between parents and teachers tense. In the eyes of a small number of extreme parents, especially the parents of the next generation, they cannot accept any criticism and punishment on their children in school. This makes some teachers choose to give up education punishment, such as giving excessive evaluation to students' enthusiasm and ignoring students' mistakes. This way will undoubtedly make students question the authority of teachers and make negative behaviors, such as disturbing the classroom order and not trying to complete the learning task. Therefore, teachers' arbitrary punishment is not conducive to the cultivation of family school relationship, but also to the formation of students' habits and learning progress, which is not desirable.

## **The Significance of Education Punishment**

As a reasonable and legal teaching method, education punishment must have its significance. Comenius expounded the significance of two educational punishments in his great teaching theory.

### **Prevent Students From Making the Same Mistake Again**

Comenius believes that the reason why people who have made mistakes should be punished is not because they have made mistakes, but because they want to make them not to do so in the future (Comenius, 2014, p. 175). If mistakes have been made, then the purpose of education and punishment is to let students know their own mistakes and correct them to improve themselves. At this time, teachers need to use the means of education and punishment to enhance students' awareness of mistakes. No one is born to learn new knowledge at one time, so mistakes are an essential part of students' learning. For example, in mathematics teaching, when

students have learned the knowledge of square root, the teacher asks, “What is the square root of root 81?” Many students will directly calculate the square root of 81 according to their new learning knowledge, but ignore that the square root of 81 is not 81, but nine. Teachers need to make clear that students’ deviant behavior here is not that students do not understand the practice, but do not understand the meaning of the topic. Then, use the means of education and punishment to punish students, and then do a few similar questions, so that they can realize the cause of mistakes, so as to achieve the effect of no longer making the same mistakes. This not only consolidates knowledge for students who make mistakes, but also stimulates other students to pay attention to the same problems. In addition, teachers should also have a certain sensitivity, correct students’ mistakes as soon as possible in class teaching and homework feedback, so that the correct practice can be consolidated, so as to improve teaching efficiency. In terms of morality, the correction of mistakes is more complicated than that of learning. For example, if a student lies, it may not be the first time that he has made a mistake. When teachers find such deviant behaviors, simple repetition of correct practices or verbal reminders are not effective. At this time, the process of education punishment will be more inclined to urge students to reflect on their own behavior in the process of communication between teachers and students, so as to make students truly aware of the deviation in their thinking and behavior.

### **Develop Students’ Correct Character**

Comenius believes that when a teacher condemns students, he should show that his actions are to build up the students’ character, not to suppress them (Comenius, 2014, p. 177). Students in elementary and middle schools are often in a rebellious stage. In addition to the current situation of precocious puberty, teachers who improperly use educational punishment methods will often stimulate students’ rebellious psychology, which will cause tension between teachers and students. Therefore, teachers should sincerely indicate their purpose of education and discipline when conducting education discipline—To establish the correct character of students. The formation of student character undoubtedly has an important influence on their future life. While teachers use educational discipline to prevent students from making the same mistakes again, they should also pay attention to the impact of educational discipline on students’ character during the implementation process. For example, in the process of education and discipline, students have not made up for their mistakes in accordance with the teacher’s disciplinary purpose, so teachers need to be patient and communicate with students and express their ideas equally. Only when students are aware of the teacher’s good intentions, will they actively accept the teacher’s guidance and reflect on their own mistakes. This also confirms the connotation of education punishment: Education punishment is not limited to teachers’ unilateral enthusiasm, but through teachers’ enthusiasm to drive students’ enthusiasm, makes students recognize mistakes, and actively build correct character from mistakes. In addition, for errors of different nature, teachers should purposefully guide students to establish different outstanding qualities. For learning mistakes, teachers should guide students to establish seriousness and patience. For moral mistakes, teachers should guide students to establish modesty and honesty.

### **The Implementation of Education Punishment**

As the main body of education punishment, teachers should treat the object and method of education punishment correctly, so that this kind of educational means can effectively promote students to acquire rich knowledge and form a sound personality. Comenius elaborated the implementation of educational punishment in his great teaching theory.

**Clear School Discipline**

Comenius uses the proverb, “School without discipline is like a millstone without water,” and discusses the importance of school discipline (Comenius, 2014, p. 175). As an important basis for teachers to use educational discipline, school discipline plays an important role in maintaining teachers’ authority and correcting students’ behaviors. In a sense, school discipline is a guide to students’ action. It can make students know what they should do, what they should not do and the consequences of what they should not do.

And school discipline does not only play a role in restricting students, but also has certain requirements for teachers. Comenius believes that discipline should be free of personal factors, with frank, sincere goals to implement, so that students know that it is good for them (Comenius, 2014, p. 175). As the main body of education punishment, teachers should show the reasons of education punishment with sincere attitude and achieve fairness and justice. Otherwise, students will despise the authority of school discipline, which will greatly reduce the binding effect of school discipline. In modern primary and secondary school education, some teachers have the behavior of “preferring superior students” and “hating inferior students.” This behavior itself conveys an unfair signal to students, which is not conducive to the development of students’ personality. Therefore, teachers should be kind to students and treat students’ mistakes objectively. Only in this way, can we stimulate students’ self-examination consciousness and achieve the desired effect of education punishment.

**Distinguishing the Nature of Errors**

Comenius believes that moral discipline should be strict, while learning discipline should be mild (Comenius, 2014, p. 175). This shows that moral education is more important than learning knowledge in a certain sense. However, in modern primary and secondary education, there is a tendency to neglect moral education punishment and exaggerate learning education punishment. In modern primary and secondary education, due to the pressure of exam oriented education, moral education is more outside the scope of classroom. For students, adolescence is the formation stage of their moral concepts, and once formed, it is very difficult to change. This is also the reason why Comenius demanded strict discipline to deal with moral mistakes. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to students’ behavior and ideological status in school. When students make moral mistakes, such as laughing at classmates at will, lying, stealing, and other behaviors, they should use the means of education and punishment to strictly stop their behavior and prevent their moral concept from deviation. In addition, teachers should also pay attention to the communication with students, so that students can understand the motivation of teachers’ behavior, so as to stimulate students to reflect on their own mistakes and establish a correct character. Comenius believes that teachers do not know how to make students accept knowledge, resulting in students are not willing to learn (Comenius, 2014, p. 90). In modern primary and secondary school teaching, teachers often abuse the means of education punishment in learning, such as excessive punishment of copying, excessive punishment of standing, etc. As mentioned above, the significance of education punishment is to prevent students from making the same mistakes again, and teachers’ excessive punishment will obviously make students feel tired and painful for learning, which is not conducive to their acceptance of new knowledge. Therefore, in order to make students keep enthusiasm for learning, teachers should use mild punishment for learning mistakes.

**Set an Example of Imitation**

Comenius believes that taking one student as the example and stimulation of another can produce better results and more happiness (Comenius, 2014, p. 31). It is difficult for students to master new knowledge and

skills. At this time, if there is a model to imitate, then he can easily imitate, so as to keep up with the teaching progress. For teachers, students' role model can cultivate students' self-learning ability, and it is also helpful to improve students' learning ability. Take the lead reading students in Chinese teaching as an example. For the students who lead the reading, he/she is an example of the whole class, which can stimulate his/her enterprising spirit and self-confidence. For other students, the pronunciation and reading emotion of the leading students are what they need to learn. This makes them imitate and learn so as to realize the connotation of the text. When the students who act as role models deviate, teachers should use the means of education and punishment to replace the examples in time, so as to avoid the negative impact of bad examples on students. This timely replacement of role models can make the whole class in a positive learning atmosphere, which has a positive effect on students' learning and personality development. In addition, Comenius believes that, "Teachers should take themselves as living examples" (Comenius, 2014, p. 177). Because of the authority of the teacher, the teacher's speech and behavior inside and outside the classroom is the object of students' attention and imitation. Therefore, on the one hand, a teacher should be a man of noble character and profound knowledge. Only when teachers themselves are strict with themselves in morality and knowledge can they be qualified to criticize students' behaviors and put forward suggestions for improvement. On the other hand, teachers should make timely adjustments in the feedback from parents and students. As an irreplaceable example, teachers should timely receive feedback from parents and students to reflect on their own behavior, try to make up for their own shortcomings and show their excellent side for students to imitate.

### Conclusion

To sum up, Comenius discussed the significance of education punishment in his great teaching theory, and put forward different methods of education punishment. The necessity and positive role of educational punishment in modern primary and secondary education are worth affirming. Therefore, teachers need to reasonably use the means of education and punishment to promote students to better learn knowledge and develop good character.

### References

- Comenius. (2014). *Grand pedagogy* (pp. 31, 90, & 175-177). (R. G. Fu, Trans.). Beijing: Education Science Press.
- Jiang, H. (2012). On education punishment and its application rationality. *Education Development Research*, 32(Z1), 115.
- Lao, K. S., & Zheng, X. R. (1997, p. 268). *Rules and Fang Yuan*. Beijing: China Railway Press.
- Li, Y. (2017). Realistic dilemma and rational return of education punishment. *Journal of Tianjin Normal University* (Basic Education Edition), 18(4).
- Ministry of Education. (2019). *Implementation of disciplinary rules for primary and secondary school teachers* (Draft). Retrieved November 23, 2019, from [http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_xwfb/s5147/201911/t20191125\\_409535.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/s5147/201911/t20191125_409535.html)
- Wang, B. L. (2009). *Curriculum and teaching theory* (p. 8). Beijing: Higher Education Press.