

The "1223 Model": Breaking Through the Dilemmas in Reading Educational Masterpieces

Tian Jing^{1,a}

¹*School of Education, Mianyang Normal University, Mianyang, China*
^a*1547860204@qq.com*

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Abstract: To address the prevalent dread and apprehension toward classic educational masterpieces among normal university students under the impact of popular culture, this study systematically constructs a reading and teaching model for educational masterpieces based on the Guidance to Educational Masterpieces course offered by the author's college. The model specifically consists of: one core, namely establishing a correct mindset toward classic reading; two tenets, emphasizing direct dialogue with the text; two basic points, namely achieving historical contextualized understanding of the text by combining its social background and the author's life experience; and three consistent emphasized dimensions. Curriculum practice shows that this model helps guide students to break through the dilemmas of "being unable to finish reading" and "being unable to understand", deepen their comprehension of educational thoughts, and realize the dual improvement of theoretical consciousness and practical ability.

1. Introduction

As time-tested crystallizations of educational wisdom, educational masterpieces contain enduring educational concepts and cultural accumulations, bearing important academic value and practical significance. However, surveys reveal that although normal university students acknowledge the value of educational masterpieces, their actual reading engagement is far from satisfactory. Under the impact of popular culture, classic texts are often regarded as abstruse and dull; students tend to prefer popularized, fast-food cultural products and develop a sense of dread. To tackle this dilemma, the College of Teacher Education at Chengdu University has offered the *Guidance to Educational Masterpieces* course for postgraduate education students, aiming to guide students in systematically studying educational classics, grasping the thread of thoughts, deepening theoretical understanding, and cultivating educational sentiment.

2. Establishing Rational Cognition: Building an Open Mindset for Classic Reading

2.1. Cultivating a Rational Reading Mindset toward Classics

Faced with the depth and complexity of theoretical classics such as *The Republic*, normal university students generally suffer from dread and comprehension obstacles, often trapped in the dual dilemmas of "being unable to finish reading" and "being unable to understand". Behind this lies the disconnect between superficial reading habits and the requirements of in-depth academic reading^[1]. Abandoning reading due to initial difficulties will leave cognitive levels stuck in a state of "ignorance", making self-reflection and academic growth impossible. As stated in *Record of Learning*: "Though there is the perfect Tao, if one does not learn it, one will not know its goodness." Classics construct an almost perfect "World of Forms", whose value lies in guiding readers to approach and understand them continuously. Therefore, the primary step is to establish a correct reading mindset: regarding oneself as a practitioner "seeking supreme goodness" rather than a perfect being who has "already attained supreme goodness". "Being unable to understand" is not a problem; the key is to build an open and inclusive cognitive structure, take the initiative to accept difficult books, and gradually construct a personal knowledge schema. Only through continuous accumulation can a leap in cognitive structure be achieved. If one only indulges in easy-to-read texts, even a large quantity of such reading amounts to "invalid repetition" and hardly brings about genuine intellectual growth.

2.2. Mastering a Systematic Methodology for Classic Study

In addition to mindset construction, methodological guidance is crucial. The "initiation" of classic reading has multi-dimensional implications: first, initiation requires active study and in-depth contemplation; second, initiation must follow the right path, avoiding reliance on uneven "second-hand" interpretations; third, initiation means opening up a systematic vision and establishing order among scattered knowledge points; fourth, two approaches must advance side by side, with extensive reading and in-depth study complementing each other. Reading classics is a long-term and dynamic intellectual practice that cannot be completed in the short term, requiring lofty aspirations. Giving up due to the abstruseness of books or rejecting rational exploration for the sake of instant gratification is indeed an obstacle to academic growth. Without the aspiration to "seek supreme goodness", one is prone to collective cognitive occlusion, unable to perceive deviations in direction or achieve academic breakthroughs. As a highly condensed form of human wisdom, the understanding of classics relies on a reading subject with sound spirituality. Reading is an act of aesthetic appreciation and judgment, grounded in individual accumulation of insight and logical thinking ability. Just as sudden insight does not stem from the simple superposition of external knowledge, but from reconstructing the relationship between the self and the world guided by logical necessity through the eye of the inner soul. In this cognitive field, experience is sublimated, understanding is deepened, and the individual achieves dual transcendence of intellect and personality on the journey toward "supreme goodness".

3. Interpreting Based on Original Texts: Practicing Direct Dialogue with Masterpieces

In the study of classic educational texts, "direct dialogue with the original work" is the basic prerequisite for understanding its ideological essence. This approach requires readers to avoid relying preconceived on "second-hand" interpretations. Although such interpretations have reference value, they are often based on third-party cognitive frameworks and aesthetic

preferences. Prior exposure to them will occupy the interpretive space reserved by readers for the original work, leading to an illusion of "having read" the original text or falling into the verification and falsification of second-hand viewpoints, depriving the original work of its original ideological vitality. Ultimately, to achieve spiritual and ideological collisions between readers and texts across time and space, as well as in-depth understanding and integration of meaning, the following two core tenets must be followed.

3.1. Pursuing the Common Origin and Goals of Human Spirit

Good readers can grasp the thread of the author's thinking from the macro perspective of historical development and understand the position of masterpieces in the history of ideas. For example, clarifying why *The Republic*, *Emile*, and *Democracy and Education* have become the three milestones in the history of educational thought. Only by grasping their historical structure and theoretical logic can one systematically understand their educational connotations and avoid fragmented comprehension. More importantly, while sorting out the historical context, one must look back at the "Axial Age" proposed by Jaspers^[2]. This period witnessed simultaneous spiritual breakthroughs in China, ancient Greece, India and other regions, laying the foundation of the ideological categories still used by humanity today and the origin of world religions, constituting the spiritual origin for the leaps of later civilizations.

3.2. Making Common-Sense Judgments Based on Reliable Facts

Another foundation of "direct dialogue" is being based on real facts rather than artificially modified ones. Many so-called "facts" today are actually products constructed or tailored for specific purposes. However, truth is built on the generalization of objective facts and should not be mixed with "cosmetically altered facts". In addition, vigilance should be exercised against the deliberate pursuit of "higher-order thinking" that transcends common sense, ignoring the basic, commonsense understanding of things. As *Record of Learning* states: "When the Three Kings sacrificed to the rivers, they all offered to the rivers first and then to the sea—this is called attending to the root." This indicates that all profound cognition is built on common sense and fundamentals^[3].

4. Relying on Specific Contexts: Realizing Contextualized Understanding of Educational Thoughts

Reading educational masterpieces can be regarded as a "thought experiment" carried out within the rational category. In this process, readers, by mobilizing their rational abilities and embodied cognition, place themselves in the historical time and space where the text was produced, achieving an "experiential" understanding of the birth of educational thoughts^[4]. Such an embodied thought experiment is not random reverie but must follow the two basic principles below.

4.1. Understanding Texts in Their Specific Social and Historical Backgrounds

Reading without a sense of context is often constrained by the contingency of interests and resources, making it difficult to grasp the inherent reasons why masterpieces have become classics^[5]. For instance, without understanding Pestalozzi's educational practice, it is hard to comprehend the origin of Herbart's *General Pedagogy*. History is like a grand puzzle, with each work serving as a key piece. An effective reading strategy should follow the logical order from

macro to micro: first construct an overall framework to grasp macro fields such as educational theory and educational psychology; then delve into meso-level aspects such as curriculum and teaching; finally focus on micro elements such as teachers and students. This "top-down" approach helps strip away subjective assumptions that may be mixed in later interpretations, thus getting closer to the original meaning of the text.

4.2. Interpreting Works in Combination with the Author's Personal Life Trajectory

Thinkers' viewpoints do not emerge out of thin air; instead, they form an organic life community with their life experiences, and each work is the ideological condensation of the author at a specific stage of life. By learning about the author's life, readers can more accurately grasp their writing style, the causes of their thoughts, and their intended audience. This approach of "understanding books through people and seeing people through books" has threefold significance: first, it helps capture the true meaning of thoughts from life experience and discover greatness in the ordinary; second, although initial reading may be full of doubts, understanding will gradually become integrated as one delves deeper into the author and the text simultaneously; third, adhering to the principle of "understanding a person by reviewing his times" allows one to gain essential understanding with limited energy, avoiding getting lost in boundless textual details.

5. Upholding a Critical Stance: Realizing Dialectical Interpretation of Classic Masterpieces

When facing educational classics, readers should abandon the "philosophy of struggle" that is black-or-white, neither blindly worshipping nor simply negating, but conducting critical reading with a rational and prudent attitude^[6]. The core of critical reading lies in distinguishing the essential difference between "putting forward critical suggestions" and "engaging in critical thinking": the former emphasizes the expression of insights based on personal experience, while the latter is an aesthetic and thinking activity that requires readers to conduct in-depth dialogue on the basis of full comprehension^[7]. To this end, readers must always adhere to the following three core principles.

5.1. Always Maintaining a Humble Attitude toward Classics

Liu Xizai pointed out in *Chizhi Shuyan*: "If nine-tenths of learning is for oneself and one-tenth is mixed in for others, this one-tenth will draw the other nine-tenths outward altogether, which is most terrifying." This view warns readers that placing one's limited subjective judgment above the true connotation of the text will lead to misinterpretation of classic works. Educational masterpieces have undergone repeated tests in the long river of history; their value lies not only in recording history but also in condensing educational wisdom, shaping rational thinking, and guiding education toward goodness. Readers should hold a reverent heart, perceive the vitality of thoughts from classics, discover greatness in the ordinary, and perceive changes in the constant.

5.2. Always Respecting the Profound Revelation of Educational Laws

Truth is the product of the conformity between subjective cognition and objective reality, and its criterion of verification must return to practice. The verification of truth is not a once-and-for-all task but a continuous process. Verified by long-term practice, educational masterpieces reveal and explain the basic laws of education in diverse forms, providing theoretical guidance for educators. By directly studying the original works, readers are

essentially dialoguing with educational laws themselves and being edified by educational truths tested by history.

5.3. Always Adhering to Cultural Consciousness and Rational Self-Confidence

We are currently in an era of information explosion, with all kinds of fragmented knowledge and popular viewpoints flooding our lives. Fast-food trends often leave only superficial impressions on people's minds yet are enough to trigger widespread anxiety. Faced with this complex situation, readers need to uphold cultural self-confidence more firmly. The profound accumulation of 5,000 years of Chinese civilization provides us with unique spiritual resources and cultural confidence. As *Zuo Zhuan* says: "China is called Xia for its grand rituals; it is called Hua for its beautiful attire." This cultural heritage equips us with sufficient foundation to maintain composure amid diverse trends of thought and stick to the original aspiration of education.

6. Conclusions

Reading educational masterpieces is essentially a cross-temporal intellectual dialogue, requiring readers to maintain both rational critical awareness and an open attitude of understanding. By establishing a reading paradigm of "thought experiments", grasping the basic tenets of "direct dialogue", and adhering to the core principles of critical reading, one can break through the limitations of time and space and establish a deep connection with classic texts. This process not only promotes the improvement of individual cognitive structure and thinking quality but also helps realize theoretical consciousness and cultural confidence in educational practice. Only by examining classics with a historical perspective, testing theories with a practical attitude, and responding to diverse trends of thought with cultural self-confidence can we truly inherit and develop the tradition of educational thought, and promote the deepening of educational research and the innovation of practice through the interaction between classics and reality.

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