

GENESIS OF THE NOTION «METHOD» IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN PEDAGOGY

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The basic provisions of the concept «method» in Europe and America are determined in the article. The historical and pedagogical analysis is made. The basic approaches to the definition of «method» category are identified in the European and the American Teacher Education.

Keywords: method, methodology, methods, educational process.

Problem statement. Practical pedagogy is but the application of the general rules established in theoretical pedagogy. After having studied the different faculties by themselves, both in their natural development and in their school training, it is proposed to examine by the light of these established principles the different parts of the course of study and the principal questions of discipline. In other terms, from the subject of education, the child, we now pass to the object of education; that is, to the methods of teaching and to the rules of school administration.

Method in general is the order which we voluntarily introduce into our thoughts, our acts, and our undertakings. To act methodically is the contrary of acting thoughtlessly, inconsiderately, without continuity and without plan. Port Royal justly defined method as «the art of rightly arranging a series of several thoughts».

Understood in this liberal sense, method is applicable to all the parts of education as to all the undertakings of man. The first duty of a teacher is, not to proceed at random, not to count upon the inspiration of the moment and upon the good fortune of improvised effort, but always to be guided by principles deliberately chosen, according to fixed rules and in a premeditated order. The lack of method is the ruin of education. There is nothing to be expected from a discipline which is hesitating and groping; from instruction which remains incoherent and disorderly, which fluctuates at the mercy of circumstances and occasions, and which, being wholly unpremeditated, allows itself to be taken at unawares.

The purpose of article. Briefly present the basic provisions of the concept «method» in Europe and America in this article. The historical and pedagogical analysis is made. The basic approaches to the definition of «method» category are identified in the European and the American Teacher Education.

Base material. In a more precise and particular sense, method designates a whole body of rational processes, of rules, of means which are practiced and followed in the accomplishment of any undertaking. Just as for the discovery of truth there are methods which logic prescribes, there will also be, for the communication and teaching of truth, other methods, the study of which constitutes practical pedagogy. Methods will vary with the nature of the subjects to be taught. Geography will be taught differently from grammar, and mathematics differently from physics. They will also vary with the age of the child. It is not possible to present history to the pupils of a primary school in the same form as to the pupils of a high school.

Consequently methods will vary with the different grades of instruction. They will be one thing in a primary school and another in a normal school; one thing in general primary instruction, and another thing in secondary instruction.

In other terms, methods of instruction should always conform to these three general principles: 1, the special characteristics of the branches of knowledge communicated to the child; 2, the laws of mental evolution at different periods of life; 3, the particular purpose and the scope of each grade of instruction.

The study of methods of instruction constitutes one of the most important divisions of educational science. To give it a name, foreign educators have borrowed from philosophy the stately term methodology. Others have called it didactics, or the art of teaching. M. Daguët ventures the designation methodics.

Special works have been devoted to methodology, which itself is subdivided, and comprises several parts. In Belgium and in Switzerland the professors of pedagogy distinguish general methodology, which treats of the principles common to all method, from special methodology, which examines in succession the different branches of instruction, and searches for the best means to be employed in each science and in each study. It is a distinction analogous to that which is found in treatises on Logic, where we study general method, applicable to all the sciences, before devoting special chapters to the method peculiar to each science.

Educators are very far from having come to an understanding as to the utility of methods and the necessity of studying them. Some are disposed to accord everything to methods, and others nothing or almost nothing.

Methods, according to Talleyrand, are the masters' masters. «The true instruments of the sciences, they are to teachers themselves what teachers are to their pupils.»

Pestalozzi, who however lacked method, and assures us that "he proceeded in his instruction without knowing what he did, guided only by very obscure but very vivid feeling,» – Pestalozzi put a very high estimate on those systematic rules which he had not sufficient reflective power to impose upon himself. At certain moments he pushes to fanaticism, even to superstition, his enthusiasm for methods, precisely because he was most lacking in them. He disowned himself, his own qualities of inspiration and feeling, and his ever-active and ever-vivifying personality when he pronounced these strange words:

«I believe that we must not think of making, in general, the least progress in the instruction of

the people, as long as we have not found modes of teaching which make of the instructor, at least so far as the elementary studies are concerned, the simple mechanical instrument of a method which owes its results to the nature of its processes, and not to the skill of him who employs it, I affirm that a school-book has no value, except so far as it can be employed by a teacher without instruction, as well as by one who is instructed.»

It is not proposed to make of the instructor an automaton, and of method a mechanism which is a substitute for the intelligence and the personal qualities of the teacher. If we recommend the study of methods, it is for the especial purpose of driving from instruction routine and questionable tradition, and not of introducing into it, under another form, a sort of learned mechanism. Methods are instruments; but instruments, however perfect they may be, owe their whole value to the skill of the hand that employs them. To the paradox of Pestalozzi we oppose the wisdom of the ages, and the proverb which says, «As is the master so is the method.» Let us also bear in mind that methods are not unchangeable regulations, despotic and irrevocable laws; it rests with the initiative of the teacher to modify them according to the results of his own experience and the suggestions of his own mind. «Methods,» as Madame Necker de Saussure says, «ought to be in a state of perpetual improvement.»

Thus understood, not as laws slavishly accepted with a superstitious respect, but as instruments which are to be handled with freedom, methods, no one will deny, may render important services.

«Method,» says M. Marion, «is a necessary condition of success, and, with respect to efficiency of service, it puts, as it were, an abyss between men of equal good intent. Descartes went so far as to say that, apparently equally as to intellectual endowments, men differ not so much by the power they have in searching for truth, as in the method which they employ. The truth is that in every kind of practical work, other things being equal, he who proceeds rationally has at least three great advantages over him who lives on expedients, from hand to mouth. Starting with a fixed purpose, he runs less risk of losing sight of it and of missing his way. Having reflected on the means at his command, he has more chances of omitting none of them and of always choosing the best. Finally, sure both of the end in view and of the means of attaining it, it depends only on himself to reach it as soon as possible. 'A lame man on a straight road,' said Bacon, 'reaches his destination sooner than a courier who misses his way'».

But, convinced as we are of the utility of methods, we do not think that it is necessary to pause to study the abstract generalities which dominate them. If this point is not guarded, the educators of our day will proceed to construct a sort of new scholastic, all bristling with learned formulas, subtle divisions, and pedantic terms. They will succeed in making of a very simple study, one wholly practical, a logic of a new kind and of a truly frightful aspect, in which fine words succeed fine words, and in which the real things are forgotten. Let us distrust the formalism which is always ready to set up its claims, because it is easier to inscribe words on paper than to awaken

emotions in the heart or to enrich the mind with positive notions.

Open one of those manuals of pedagogy which are so very popular in Belgium and Germany. You will there find interminable pages devoted to the distinction between principles, modes, forms, processes, and methods of instruction [5]. You will there see crowded tables which contain no less than eight forms of instruction: the acromatic form, or that of uninterrupted exposition, the erotematic, or that of interrupted exposition, which contains no less than seven other distinct forms, as the catechetical, socratic, heuristic, repetitive, examinative, analytic and synthetic, and the paralogic. As if this were not enough, there follows a subdivision of processes, as the intuitive, comparative, by opposition, etymological, by reasoning, descriptive, by internal observation, repetitive, synoptic, by reproduction, and eleven processes besides!

What good can come from this tedious analysis, from this complicated enumeration, from this purely verbal science, in which hundreds of words are employed, and yet teach nothing of the things themselves? Teaching would become a very laborious art, were it necessary, in order to be a good instructor, to have lodged in the memory all these definitions of pure form, all these insipid abstractions. It is said that modern education tends to approach nature. Alas! we are far from nature with these distillers of pedagogic quintessence, who split hairs, who distinguish and analyze the simplest things, and invent several barbarous terms to designate identical operations. For a long time it was thought that it was impossible to reason well without knowing the categories and the rules of the syllogism. Let us not imagine, by a similar illusion, that in order to teach well one's memory must be stuffed with this pedagogic nonsense, with these nomenclatures as vain as pretentious.

It is not only their inutility that alarms us. «We also fear that they may divert the mind from more serious interests, and that this unsubstantial food may destroy the taste for more solid and substantial aliment. We fear that that which gives instruction its real power, life, inner emotion, free and original inspiration, may succumb under this maze of abstractions which fetter the mind and make it bend under the weight of these dangerous puerilities.

Hence let us shun all those sterile discussions which consist in knowing, for example, which are the general principles, the special principles, the positive principles, the negative principles of teaching; or, still further, «whether analysis is a method or a form». Let us be satisfied with a few definite notions, and as summary as possible.

Without wishing to multiply distinctions, it is nevertheless impossible to confound with methods, properly so-called, what it has been agreed to call modes of teaching.

Modes of teaching depend neither on the order which is followed nor upon the means which are employed for instructing children; they have reference simply to the different groups of pupils and to different ways in which the instruction is distributed.

There is the individual mode, as when the teacher addresses himself to a single pupil; or the simultaneous mode, as when he addresses himself

to several pupils, as to a whole class; or the mutual mode, when the teacher stands aside and requires the children to instruct one another.

The individual mode is really appropriate only in private education, where a preceptor is face to face with a single pupil. At school there is no propriety in proceeding in this way, and it is difficult to imagine a class where the teacher repeats forty times to forty pupils what it suffices to say once to all.

It was this system, however, or something very like it, that was formerly employed in the early history of the school. In the seventeenth century, for example, the Ecole paroissiale, a school manual of the times, says in literal terms: "Those who go to the master to read shall present themselves but two at once. The teacher shall call the writers to his desk, two by two, to correct their exercises» [2].

All that remains, all that can remain of individual instruction, in a class regularly organized, is the interrogation which the teacher addresses to a single pupil. Such interrogations should be made with a loud voice, in order that all the pupils may participate in the exercise.

As to the mutual mode, it was but an expedient suggested by necessity at the time when teachers were scarce and resources were limited, and it was necessary at slight expense to instruct well or ill a very large number of pupils. [1, p. 98] Almost universally abandoned today, and virtually condemned, the mutual system never had a claim in theory to be regarded as a rational mode of school organization.

There remains the simultaneous mode [4, p. 55], which is the only one possible in classes more or less numerous, if it is desired that without loss of time the sound instruction of an experienced teacher, not that of a monitor without authority, should be directly transmitted to all the pupils.

It is true that the simultaneous mode, though it is the general rule and the prevailing form of instruction, ought not to proscribe absolutely the incidental and exceptional use of other systems. So far as possible, the teacher ought, while addressing himself to all, to speak to each; he ought to take account of the vivacity of some and the slowness of others; he should vary his language, so as to accommodate himself to the different aptitudes of his pupils; finally, he should not forget that, though his instruction is simultaneous, his attention and his efforts ought to remain individual.

On the other hand, in very large schools and in those where a single teacher has three divisions to manage, the master sometimes needs to appeal to the good-will of his best pupils, and thus to employ something like mutual instruction. This is what is called the mixed mode. [3, p. 35]

There might also be retained, although it is of less importance, the classical distinction between meth-

ods and processes, methods being the sum of the principles which preside over instruction, assign to it its end, regulate its order, and determine its course; while processes signify the particular means which are employed in the application of methods.

Thus to demonstrate geometrical truths is a method; to exhibit them on a board, and then cause them to be repeated by the pupils, is a process. To give a didactic exposition of historical facts is a method; to require restatements from pupils is a process.

The further pedagogy enters into the detail of methods and into the minute examination of processes, the nearer it will approach its end, which is not to construct beautiful theories, but to render practical services. However, before entering upon the different varieties of studies, before searching for the rules which are especially adapted to each of them, it is not without use to throw a glance over the general methods of instruction and the rules applicable to all the parts of the programme. Besides being interesting in itself to reduce apparent diversities to unity, and to look for essential principles in the multitude of particular applications, educators have so extended the list of methods, they offer us so great a luxuriance and so stately a display of pedagogical instruments, that it is necessary to simplify their classifications and to try to introduce some clearness into a subject which it seems so easy to make obscure.

Conclusions. All the considerations which precede have no other practical utility than that of obliging the teacher to reflect upon the principles of instruction themselves, and upon the necessity of taking into account both the nature of the children to whom he addresses himself, and the nature of the knowledge which he communicates.

Let no one imagine that it is sufficient, in order to teach well, to know the abstract distinctions of pedagogy. The first condition for being a good teacher is always to possess a thorough knowledge of the subject which he has to teach.

An English educator, M. Laurie, justly observes, «A teacher himself possessed of a disciplined intelligence and of a will fortified by religion, reason, and experience, may be working wisely towards the production in others of that which is in himself, and be unconsciously adapting his processes to a sound method.» But however well endowed he may be in respect of instruction or intelligence, he will always be inferior to a teacher who to the same personal qualities adds that which gives power, assurance, and decision, the reflective knowledge of the natural laws for the development of the intelligence, of the characteristics of each school study, and consequently of the methods which most easily find the route to the mind and are best adapted to each topic of instruction.

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ГЕНЕЗИС ПОНЯТТЯ «МЕТОД» У КОНТЕКСТІ СУЧАСНОЇ ПЕДАГОГІКИ

Анотація

У статті визначено та теоретично обґрунтовано зміст і основні положення поняття «метод» в країнах Європи та Америки. Проведено його історико-педагогічний аналіз. Виділено основні підходи щодо визначення категорії «метод» у європейській та американській педагогічній освіті.

Ключові слова: метод, методологія, методика, навчальний процес.

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Аннотация

В статье определены и теоретически обоснованы содержание и основные положения понятия «метод» в странах Европы и Америки. Проведен его историко-педагогический анализ. Выделены основные подходы к определению категории «метод» в европейском и американском педагогическом образовании.

Ключевые слова: метод, методология, методика, учебный процесс.