

# The Enlightenment of Locke's Educational Concepts on Chinese Adolescents' Physique Education

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## Abstract

This paper first illustrates John Locke's Educational concepts, such as promoting the view of talent of all-round development of physique, morality and intelligence, paying attention to the curriculum view of physical health education, paying attention to choice of teacher, model education, and teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. Then combining the physical characteristics of Chinese adolescents, it further expounds the enlightenment on Chinese adolescents' physique education. We have to learn from Locke's view of talent and to adhere to the educational goals of cultivating all-round development of physique, morality, intelligence and aesthetics, to learn from Locke's view of curriculum, to put the physique education of young students in the primacy of school education, cultivating their healthy body, to learn Locke's teaching concept and do a good job in physique education for adolescents. The aim is to right the position of school physical education, improve adolescents' healthy physique, and cultivate socialist builders and successors with full-scale development of morality, intelligence, and aesthetics.

## Keywords

Locke's Educational Concepts, Chinese Adolescents, Physique Education

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## 1. Introduction

John Locke (1632-1704) was a famous British political thinker, philosopher and educator in the seventeenth century. His major works include *Two Treatises of Government*, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. His educational concepts are mainly reflected in the

book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* written in 1692.

John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* was the mainstream and standard of family education in the era that it produced. Although it has some limitations, it has indeed played a reference role in the educational practice of various countries.

In *Locke's Educational Thoughts and its Contemporary Significance*, the author discusses the role, purpose, and approach of education. Then he discusses the contents and methods of health education, moral education, and intellectual education; and expounds the enlightenment of Locke's educational thoughts on contemporary Chinese education, especially the significance of enlightenment on school education and family education in China, in which he talked about the strengthening of physical exercise, people-oriented moral education, quality-oriented education and curriculum reform, as well as the improvement of the teaching staff (Wu, 2008).

Based on historical data, Sun discusses the background of Locke's thought on physical education, role of sports, content of sports, methodology sports, and its characteristics and inspiration (Sun, 2010).

Locke nurturance education aims at the training of gentlemen, emphasizing the health of the body and mind, and focusing on the cultivation of good virtues. Locke's nurturance education provides a reference for China's quality-oriented education: Quality-oriented education should pay attention to physical and spiritual education, pay attention to the role of family and role of models, early cultivation, more practice, and pay attention to the subjectivity of the educated (Li & Xie, 2014).

Locke emphasized that the purpose of education is to cultivate a new type of gentleman with the four basic qualities of "virtuous, wisdom, etiquette, and learning". This new type of gentleman is also a free citizen required by the political society, who is an independent and free person with good morality. Locke believes that liberal education should follow three major principles: obedience to rational principles, conforming to natural principles, and practical principles (He, 2015).

Han mainly analyzes Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and uses it as the research medium to analyze the moral education thoughts it conveys, and some inspirations of these thoughts for the primary school children's family education (Han, 2016).

On the basis of clarifying the essence of John Locke's educational thoughts, Wang Senting analyzes its educational goals, educational methods and the enlightenment of "ignorance theory" on the development of adult education, actively exploring the path of adult education development (Wang, 2017).

In general, most scholars have studied the Locke's educational thought from theoretical point of view. They analyzed the contents and essence of the thought and its influence on school education and family education. But, at present, few scholars have studied the influence of his thought on adolescents' physique edu-

cation, and there are some deficiencies in this field. This paper will have a try to specifically illustrate the enlightenment of Locke's educational concepts on Chinese adolescents' physique education, which is the innovation of this study. It aims to provide references for all kinds of schools to improve adolescents' physique fitness. Therefore, this study is of practical significance.

## 2. Locke's Educational Concept in Some Thoughts Concerning Education

In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke placed education in a very important position, arguing that education has a direct bearing on personal growth and prosperity of the country. He said: "I think I may say, that of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education. It is that which makes the great difference in mankind." (Locke, 1985). Moreover, Locke believes that prosperity can be guaranteed only if children are well educated. Starting from this understanding, the educational ideas that Locke explicitly proposed in the book include:

### 2.1. Promoting the View of Talent of All-Round Development of Physique, Morality and Intelligence

The view of talent is the understanding and recognition of talent standards, and it is an orientation to the value of talent. Locke's view of talent is reflected in his exposition of educational purposes. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke proposed that the purpose of education is to cultivate goodness, usefulness, and capable gentlemen, and specifically expounded his gentleman education ideas from three aspects: physical education, moral education and intellectual education. It is believed that a strong body is the premise in the process of cultivating a gentleman, which emphasizes the cultivation of a strong, courageous and firm person through sports so that they can fight for their own interests at any time.

As for morality and moral education, Locke regards them as the soul of gentleman and the education of gentleman. He believes that a gentleman must possess such moral qualities as sense, etiquette, wisdom, and courage. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke used a lot of space to describe moral education. He thought that among a variety of character of a person or a gentleman, morality ranks the first place and it is the most indispensable. Without morality, he will not be able to obtain happiness in this life. Morality is a treasure in spirit. Therefore, Locke advocated that children should practice moral behavior through early practice and eventually develop strong moral habits.

Regarding intellectual education, Locke sees it as an auxiliary part of the education of gentlemen. He believes that under the premise of a healthy body, morality ranks first and knowledge second. He claims that the aim of knowledge education is to develop understanding and thinking ability to lay good foundation for further study. Therefore, he emphasized that it is necessary to teach children to get knowledge from books and guide them to practice and master

some skills, and he drew up extensive learning subjects, such as reading, writing, shorthand, theology, logic, geometry, dance, fencing, gardening, sculpture, business computing and so on.

## 2.2. Paying Attention to the Curriculum View of Physical Health Education

In terms of curriculum, Locke specially emphasized the importance of physical education. In the West, he was the first educator to propose and demonstrate sports issues in detail. Although in the book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, he did not discuss the specific content of school sports activities, he placed sports at the first place of school education. At the beginning of the book he states: “A SOUND mind in a sound body, is a short, but full description of a happy state in this world. He that has these two, has little more to wish for; and he that wants either of them, will be but little the better for anything else.” (Locke, 1985). “How necessary health is to our business and happiness; and how requisite a strong constitution, able to endure hardships and fatigue, is to one that will make any figure in the world, is too obvious to need any proof.” (Locke, 1985).

It can be seen that Locke put the exercise in the first place to cultivate children’s physical constitution. First of all, to cultivate children’s good habits of doing exercise, the children have to participate in swimming, horse riding, fencing and other various sports activities at an appropriate age. Through the learning and practice of sports skills, children can develop their sports interests and exercise habits to benefit them for the rest of their lives. Secondly, whether it is spring, summer, autumn or winter, hot and cold, children should be encouraged to carry out outdoor sports. Through outdoor sports, they can both exercise their physiques, and at the same time they can cultivate their habits of adapting to the changes of the four seasons. In addition, while children develop exercise habits, they should also be trained not to go swimming, drink cold drinks, or sit on cold and wet ground when their bodies are hot or when their blood is inflated so as not to affect their health. In short, Locke proposed that if children want to have healthy bodies, they must develop good habits of physical exercise from an early age, which stress the importance of sports on children’s health physique.

At the same time, Locke also pointed out that physical education is not merely a simple physical exercise, but should also include many aspects such as clothing, food, sleep and so on. In the book, Locke summed up the content of health education as more open air, more exercise, more sleep; plain and simple food, no wine or strong drinks, little or no drugs, clothes should not be too warm and too strait, not too warmly clad or covered. For example, when it comes to sleep, Locke believes that sleep can promote the development of children and ensure their healthy growth. Therefore, it is vital to develop children’s good habit of early to bed and early to rise to ensure that they could have enough sleep.

### 2.3. Paying Attention to Choice of Teacher, Model Education, and Teaching Students in Accordance with Their Aptitude

First of all, Locke believes that teachers play an important role in the realization of education goals. Therefore, he put forward strict requirements for teachers and criteria for selecting teachers. He believes that as teachers, they should not only have rigorous working style and scholars' personalities, but also should be well educated. They must be able to bow to etiquette, be wise and sensible as well as pay attention to their own words and deeds.

Second, Locke believes that the role of models and demonstrations in the education of children is very important. The most concise, easiest and most effective way is to set an example for what they should do or should avoid. Show them, and then guide them with the teacher's verbal enlightenment, so that they may know more clearly with more profound impression. Nothing can be as gentle and profound as example. On this basis, Locke demands that teachers should set an example and use their own words and deeds to act as an example.

In the end, Locke respects the differences among children, stressing that people should choose education methods differently, target them, and teach them in accordance with their aptitude. He thought it was difficult to find two children to be taught in exactly the same way. In terms of physical health education, Locke pointed out that because of the different physical constitution of each individual, teachers or parents must choose the proper training method according to their specific characteristics in the implementation process of sports education so as to avoid tedious contents led by disengagement from children or adverse consequences for children's physical development because of improper exercise patterns. In addition, the book also mentions that physical health education for children should be based on education principles and methods such as combining education with recreation, convincing people by reasoning, teaching in games, opposing to corporal punishment and advocating rewards.

### 3. The Enlightenment of Locke's Educational Philosophy on Chinese Adolescents' Physique Education

It can be seen from the above that Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* has obvious characteristics of the times. Though there are some limitations, the educational concept embodied in it is generally progressive. Conscientiously studying these concepts is of great significance to the current Chinese teenagers' healthy physique education.

For a long time, the party and the government have always attached great importance to the physique education of adolescent students. However, due to the pressure of higher education in primary and secondary education, the school's concept of physique education for adolescents has not been implemented. Students basically spend time on cultural knowledge learning in addition to physical education 2 - 3 times a week. At the same time, the university

public physical education courses only last two years. What's more, college students are affected by employment pressure and focus on professional curriculum learning and social practice exercises. Therefore, most young people can't master sports skills after leaving the school, and they can't develop the habit of physical exercise for life, although they are receiving physical education from elementary school to university.

### **3.1. To Learn from Locke's View of Talent and to Adhere to the Educational Goals of Cultivating All-Round Development of Physique, Morality, Intelligence and Aesthetics**

For any country or nation, talent is the key and education is the foundation. In the critical period of building a harmonious and comprehensive well-to-do society and an innovative country in China, Locke's educational idea of all-round development and view of talent that pay attention to the harmonious development of sports, moral education and intellectual education provide references for insisting on the education policy of cultivating the all-round talents, firmly believing in education reform and training socialist builders and successors that meet the needs of building a well-to-do society in an all-round way and building an innovative country.

China's National Planning Outline for Medium to Long Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2010) emphasizes that education is the cornerstone of national rejuvenation and social progress, and it is the fundamental way to improve people's quality and promote people's all-round development. It is necessary to adhere to the unity of cultural knowledge learning and ideological and moral cultivation, the unity of theoretical study and social practice, and the unity of comprehensive development and individual development. Strengthen physical education, firmly establishing the concept of health first. Strengthen mental health education, promoting students' physical and mental health, physical strength and strong-will. Strengthen aesthetic education, cultivating students' good aesthetic taste and humanistic quality. Strengthen labor education, train students to love labor and the working people. Attach importance to safety education, life education, national defense education, and sustainable development education. All of the above will be helpful to promote the organic integration of moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education, and improve the overall quality of students.

### **3.2. To Learn from Locke's View of Curriculum, to Put the Healthy Physique Education of Young Students in the Primacy of School Education, Cultivating Their Healthy Body**

Young people are the future of the country. The health of their physique directly affects the development of the entire nation. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke's educational idea of putting physical education the first place in all education is undoubtedly a progressive and forward-looking educational

philosophy. Today this concept still has an important practical significance for China's ongoing basic education reform.

In China, it has been always attached importance to the health education of young students. Mao Zedong had twice instructed the Ministry of Education to clarify that school education should implement the concept of "health first". The *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Deepening Education Reform and Promoting Quality Education in an All-round Way* (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 1999) also stressed that healthy physical fitness is the basic prerequisite for the youth to serve the motherland and the people. It is a manifestation of the vitality of the Chinese nation. School education should establish the guiding ideology of health first and earnestly strengthen sports work. In 2007, in order to further promote the healthy physique development of adolescents, the Ministry of Education and the State General Administration of Sport issued the No. 8 document on the implementation of the *National Student Physique Fitness Health Standards*, which stipulates the standards and implementation measures for students' physical fitness tests, related test methods and instrument specifications. In order to establish and improve the national students' health monitoring and evaluation mechanism and motivate students to actively participate in physical exercise, on July 18, 2014, the Ministry of Education issued *the National Student Physical Health Standards* (Revised in 2014), requiring schools to carry out standard test work and grade students according to the total scores of the school year in all grades. Only students who have achieved "good or above", can he or she be qualified for appraisal and awards.

However, for a long time, China's basic education has experienced deviations in its educational goals. In many places, it has overemphasized intellectual education, resulting in the "studying first" replacing "talent first" and "examination-oriented education" replacing "quality-oriented education". Unilaterally pursuing higher rates of entering higher school, many schools have neglected or even sacrificed students' opportunities and time for physical exercise. They even eliminated the course of health and hygiene. It consequently led to a decline in the physical fitness of adolescents. This has become an indisputable fact.

The *National Physical Fitness Monitoring Bulletin* (General Administration of Sport of China, 2014) shows that compared with the results of the survey in 2010, the students' physical fitness and health status have generally improved, and the physique of primary and middle school students continue to show a steady trend. Physical fitness indicators such as speed, flexibility, strength and endurance of the students have improved in most groups. Primary school pupils and junior high school students had the fastest rate of poor eyesight detection, poor eyesight showed a tendency toward younger age, and the rate of obesity also continued to rise. But the physical quality of college students continues to show a declining trend. The physical quality indicators such as speed, explosiveness and endurance of boys in the age group of 19 to 22 are declining.

This result once again warns us that if we do not change the current status of examination-oriented education, then what we will lose in the future is not only the healthy physique of a generation of young students, but also the country's future competitiveness. Today, referring to Locke's educational philosophy, in order to fundamentally change the status quo of stressing intellectual education while neglecting physical education and truly attach importance to physical education in schools, the following must be done:

First, conscientiously implement the top-level design. Based on the "*Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Strengthening the Comprehensive Development of School Physical Education to Promote the Physical and Mental Health of Students*" and "*Standards for Physical Education and Health Courses*", establish a health-centered education concept and clarify educational idea of students' health first. Strictly implement the *Opinions on Strengthening Juvenile Sports to Strengthen the Physique Fitness of Youngsters* of the State Council to ensure that students exercise for one hour per day.

Ensure the students' physical education courses and extracurricular activities. Improve conditions for physical education and the quality of school physical education, implement performance evaluation.

Second, establish the thinking and concept of "complementing the short board and promoting balance" to achieve a comprehensive and balanced development of students' morality, intelligence, physique and aesthetics. The physical, intellectual and comprehensive qualities of the younger generation are an important manifestation of a country's overall national strength. Physical strength is national strength. School physical education should not only cultivate the young students' sports consciousness, ensure that they master the basic knowledge of sports and health, technical skills, but also should develop their habit of lifelong exercising. Only by further strengthening the concept of comprehensive and balanced development of students' morality, intelligence, physique and aesthetics, can we plan school education with the overall thinking system and follow up powerful measures. This can effectively supplement students' shortcomings of sports and aesthetic education in the quality-oriented education and improve the quality of talent in an all-round way.

Third, relevant government departments must provide support and supervision. The administrative department of education should earnestly implement the *Basic Standards for the National School Sports Health Regulations (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2012)*, incorporate the conditions for school physical education into education quality monitoring and education supervision, and establish the system of "supervision and management" for students' physical health and school sports work. In practical work, whether the "student's health first" education idea is implemented, whether student training can be achieved, and whether young students can grow up healthily depends not only on the school, but also on the investment in sports hardware facilities. The running of school in accordance with the law requires the support of

relevant government departments. Therefore, the implementation of health first needs the support and supervision of relevant government departments.

### **3.3. To Learn Locke's Teaching Concept and Do a Good Job in Healthy Physique Education for Adolescents**

Locke's teaching concept reveals that in order to carry out physical education for young students in school, teachers must first strengthen their self-cultivation. As what Locke said, As a mentor, one should have a good self-cultivation, and should have appropriate manners and courtesy at all times, anywhere and at any time. For the current Chinese PE teachers, the most important thing is to have the basic rules to be a man of strong professionalism and sense of responsibility, to be a man with self-discipline, neat clothes, as well as noble and civilized ideological qualities. Also, they should have solid professional knowledge and basic scientific and cultural qualities, good psychological quality, so that it is conducive to carrying out teaching activities.

In terms of specific teaching methods, what Locke advocates "playing the role of model, teaching students in accordance with their aptitude, combining education with recreation, playing games", etc. still provide reference for us.

Take teaching students in accordance with their abilities for example. Promoting all-round development of students' personality is one of the goals of Chinese school physical education. Therefore, this teaching method has special significance in improving the health of young students, but how to use it in practical teaching to get the best teaching effect is still being explored. Locke's assertion in this regard reminds to do the following: first, recognize the individual differences of students, respect each student's interests, hobbies, personality and personality, and strive to help each student's personality get healthy and harmonious development through educational activities. Secondly, optimize the curriculum system and make full use of the existing sports hardware facilities of the school, set up less compulsory courses but more elective courses so that every student has the opportunity to choose their favorite sports activities. Thirdly, improve the classroom teaching mode, enrich classroom teaching forms and create a relaxed and active classroom atmosphere.

## **4. Conclusion**

In short, Locke pays attention to promoting the view of talent of all-round development of physique, morality and intelligence, paying attention to the curriculum view of physical health education, paying attention to choice of teacher, model education, and teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. Although several centuries later, as a famous educator in the history of the world, Locke's many educational ideas still have many values today that we can learn from and ponder over.

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Locke's education concept on Chinese adolescents' healthy physique education, the research results will be promoted through the science popularization platform, which enables all types of schools to recognize Locke, a world famous educator in history, and his educational ideas. Revisiting these ideas and propositions has important practical significance for righting the position of school physical education, for the improvement of adolescents' healthy physique, and for the cultivation of socialist builders and successors with full-scale development of morality, intelligence, and aesthetics.

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