

The Case Teaching Method and Its Characteristics

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Abstracts:

The case teaching method has a long history. It has been paid wide attention by educators for its outstanding functions. Then, what is the case teaching method? What characteristics does it have? Answers to these questions have important sense in using this teaching method rightly and bringing it into play fully.

Keywords: the Case Teaching Method; Classroom Teaching

The case teaching method was invented by Socrates, a philosopher in ancient Greece. It was originally a way to discuss, in detail, to lead the students to catch the description of truth by asking questions constantly and revealing the contradictions continuously in the answers. Plato, the student of Socrates, opened up the case teaching method in the Western by compiling a book, in which he explained all the reasons with stories. Modern case teaching method originated from Harvard University, so it is called the teaching method of Harvard. It was invented by Professor Christopher, the president of law school of Harvard. And it was wildly used in teaching in majors of Law, Business Administration and so on. *Cooperative Agreement between China and America*, which was signed by Deng Xiaoping in 1979, benefited the explorations of case teaching method in Chinese education circles. The agreement had the item of introducing this teaching method in China. On the basis, an expert group, which was made of experts from China and America, was set up. From then on, the explorations of case teaching method started in China.

1. The Implication of Case Teaching Method

The academic circles have not unifying understandings about what is the case teaching method at present. But *Education Dictionary* has that it is a kind of teaching method used in professional teaching of some subjects in social science in colleges and universities by organizing discussions of a series of cases, putting forward the countermeasures and making the student grasping some professional skills and knowledge¹. The method has been widely used in teaching of Law, Medicine, Management, Pedagogy etc. And the practice of the method has caused a revolutionary transformation in teaching. Just for its remarkable function, many educators regard it as an important way to improve education effect, to combine theory with practice and to promote classroom teaching in colleges and universities. As a new teaching method, the case teaching method has special traits and unique advantages.

2. The Characteristics of Case Teaching Method

Firstly, the case teaching method is able to make theory from virtual to actual. The cases used in case teaching method originate from social practice. And the most important trait of social practice is its authenticity and concreteness. The teacher chose actual case with virtual theory, guide its analysis and discussion, reveal and lead the students to understand and grasp the abstract theory. In the process, virtual and actual is united and the virtual theory gets definite and concrete and the student will think that the virtual theory is appreciable, intelligible and acceptable.

Secondly, the case teaching method is able to make knowledge from dead to living. The case used in case teaching method comes from real life and actual practice. And then its most significant trait and its soul is its vividness. The case is the bridge which connects the inelegant knowledge with the flexible reality. In the usage of the case teaching method, the teacher reveals the truth by explaining the case and making the students discuss the case. Therefore, the students will regard knowledge as thinking truth, not dead doctrine. Who will hold that the cause of obtaining truth is dead? And who will think that the truth itself is dead?

Lastly, the case teaching method is able to make student from object to subject. Modern education theory has that the educated is the object sometimes and the subject sometimes in the procedure of teaching. It is critical to guide the change of the educated from the object to the subject in pursuit of the teaching success. Certainly, the case teaching method will play role in the transformation. We will see the students' active participation, consideration and exploration from reading, analyzing to discussing the case. Therefore, the student changes its status naturally from passive object to active subject. In doing so, the subjectivity and the activeness of the student are fully embodied and the promotion of the teaching effect is fundamentally guaranteed.

As a new teaching method, the case teaching method has advantages over traditional lecture method. Just for these advantages, it is paid close attention by university teachers. And it has been widely used in classroom teaching.

References

¹ *Education Dictionary*, Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press, 1991:42.