

Discuss some of the ideas about education in Ancient Greek Philosophy. Are any of those ideas still relevant to contemporary education?

This essay will approach the question “Discuss some of the ideas about education in Ancient Greek Philosophy”. It will do this by firstly discussing the work of the earliest influential Greek philosopher, Socrates, the essay will then go on to discuss his student, Plato and thirdly, Plato’s student, Aristotle. Finally the essay will conclude by summarising the relevance of these philosophical ideas in contemporary education today.

Socrates was a street philosopher and his education was therefore open to everyone. This was a very contemporary view for his time when education was only for males and strictly not for slaves. The Athenian education resembled that of its politics. People who could argue could hold power as they could sway the assembly, therefore, in Athens “the advanced student was taught how effectively to argue for or against any proposition” (Myers, 1963:88). “It was Socrates who allegedly ‘first called philosophy down from the sky’” (Cicero cited in McPherran 2010:523). Socrates main philosophical ideology is that of virtue ethics. He associated knowledge with virtue. You achieve virtues through knowledge, virtues are moral excellence and through virtues you achieve happiness (Reeve, 2006). He taught this through his method of teaching which is commonly referred to as Socratic Method, but which is referred to in Greek texts as the Elenchos (McPherran, 2010).

“Socrates tends in modern discussions to be associated with a particular idea of teaching: one that is based on questions, and involves no direct transfer of information but rather allows the pupil to see the truth for himself” (Rowe, 2001:6). As this teaching method involves questioning, the students must be committed to the teaching style as, “the first axiom of Socratic teaching is ‘start where the students are’” (Swardson, 2005 cited in McPherran 2010:527). If students aren’t committed then it can’t work as it relies on their questioning. This means that Socratic Method can be used for all disciplines and for everyone, as long as they are committed to learn. For example in the Meno “Plato depicts Socrates interrogating a boy untutored in mathematics about a form of Pythagorean theorem, leading him to the correct conclusion through questions, while telling him nothing directly”