

Problems, Dilemma and Thinking of General Education Curriculum Reform in Chinese University

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Abstract: At present, high-level universities at home and abroad are devoted to the reform of general education, which has a positive impact on the talent training goal of our universities. However, general education curriculum also faces such problems as how to deal with the relationship between general curriculum and specialized courses, the relationship between curriculum form and content, the relationship between curriculum theory and practice. The existence of these problems actually reflects the dilemma of general curriculum reform: the core goal is to be people-oriented or social-oriented? the education connotation is knowledge transfer or value cultivation? the value philosophy promotes value initiative or value consciousness? Based on this, we appeal the government to foster an external environment in which general spirit grow up, and to grasp the teacher, the textbook and the teaching method as breakthrough. All sides work together, promoting the development of general knowledge curriculum.

1. Introduction

Since the 21st century. China's higher education has made remarkable achievements in scale, quality and international influence. But there are two "disturbing clouds" floating in the sunny sky of the higher education. One is from the late academician Qian Xuesen's confusion about why Chinese university is always unable to produce outstanding talents, and the other is from professor Qian Liqun of Peking university, who is worried that our university is cultivating the "exquisite egoists" No matter what, the two questions, in final analysis, is about what kind of person to train and how to train. It is the fundamental problem of the university, and it is also an urgent problem to be solved in the reform of general education in China.

2. The Problems of General Curriculum Reform in Chinese University

The idea of general education in modern universities spread rapidly although it entered China at the end of last century. Most universities already offer general courses and gradually establish the organization and management system. But it seems that there are still several outstanding problems in the reform of general curriculum.

2.1. General Curriculum: Complementary to Professional Courses

Influenced by the Soviet Union model, higher education in China devoted to training professionals for the construction of socialism after Liberation.

It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that some universities began to carry out the pilot work of cultural quality education, in order to adapt to the needs of the society and reverse the disadvantages of excessive specialization. Later, the kind of pilot moves to comprehensive promotion. the general educational exploration is beginning to take shape.

The early development of general education is described as a "process of consensus pursuit led by the government and the cultural elite"^[1]. Under the strong leadership of government, China has rapidly established a general talent-training target of higher education by administrative means, in line with the national development. With the popularization and internationalization of higher education, colleges and universities began to explore their own general curriculum system.

The implementation mode of general course can be divided into three types. The most common pattern is public compulsory and general elective. Students must complete the required credits of general elective courses in order to meet graduation requirements. The second is the mode of general core curriculum, which implement general education on the basis of wide-caliber professional education, taking humanistic education as the core. The third is the college model. General education and professional education carries out in stages through the relatively independent college and other units. A small number of research university make reform in this way.

No matter what kind of model is adopted, a fact cannot be ignored. There is a speciality in university. Especially in China, specialized department pattern is very stable, which has taken the specialized education as the core. In practice, the general course can not shake the strength of professional courses and can not replace the required courses such as ideological and political education and English. So it can only be carried out in the form of elective course, which is full of general introduction courses. Even in some universities, general curriculum completely reduced to the accessories of specialized curriculum, which further squeeze the limited space of general curriculum.

2.2. General Curriculum: Form Over Content

General education is an imported product. The key lies in the construction of the curriculum system. It is an important proposition that how to embed general curriculum in colleges with deep-rooted specialties. It is also the focus of Chinese scholars. On this issue, the transplantation and innovation of curriculum is recognized as an effective way.

In the process of transplantation and innovation, we have learned western experiences such as curriculum content, structure, organization and management. At the same time, general education believes that universities should not only cultivate people's professional skills, but also the integrity so that students could become responsible citizens of society.

To achieve this goal, the general curriculum in China has covered many fields of humanities and nature, emphasizing the basic and the comprehensive content and building a bridge for communication and dialogue between highly specialized disciplines. However, in the practice, it is quite common to choose a certain number of courses as general courses from economics, management, engineering and so on. This leads to a large scale of general courses involving a wide range of subjects, but in fact the structure is lack of systematism. The office of educational administration unified the teaching task, each college is responsible for the curriculum organization, and the teachers carry out the teaching. On the macroscopic view, the teaching procedure is completed, containing the syllabus, design, organization, assessment and evaluation, but the teaching effect is uneven because of the lack of staff security and polity incentives.

2.3. General Curriculum: Uneven Development of Ideas and Practice

General education in Chinese universities is undergoing a transition period from popularization to deepening. But one problem that cannot be ignored is: the current discourse confrontation of general education is the elite says what the elite understand, but the staff at all levels does what they could do.[1] The development of education vision and practice unbalanced.

The importance of general education has been constantly affirmed. Its rapid development is the result of the joint efforts of government, universities and educators, which make general education become a social consensus.

But it is difficult to effectively translate vision into corresponding practice. Although general education can benefit students and ultimately serve social development, it is difficult to achieve short-term results and doesn't have quantified measurement system, which has interest conflict with the timely social evaluation of universities. A considerable number of colleges and universities are just for the sake of necessity. The teacher must spend more time and energy when undertaking general courses. But under the system of teacher evaluation oriented to scientific research, the return rate is very low. An important goal for students who pay high costs for higher education, such as money and time, is to achieve parity or higher returns in an increasingly competitive society. This has made them more willing to accept a type of pragmatical education.

Professor Shen Junshan, the former president of National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan, concludes the difficulties of general education practice as below: no one is willing to care, no professor is willing to teach and no student is willing to pay mind to listen. In fact, this is a game between institutional constraints and potential rules.[2] Universities, teachers and students are trying to find a balance point in the education reform.

3. The Dilemma of General Curriculum Reform in Chinese University

The problems listed above are related to the localization, the richness and the diversity of general education, which is the result of a combination of factors. Promoting the education quality, we should not only focus on problems but also reflect on the dilemma encountered in the development.

3.1. The Core Goal: Human-oriented or Social-oriented?

On the relationship between general education and professional education, there are three representative points. The first is the two kinds of education are the juxtaposition concepts, the second is general education is the subordinate concept, and the third is general education is the epistatic concept. It seems to be discussing the relationship between the two, but in fact it is about what kind of people higher education is about to train.

General education and professional education are equally important and inseparable in higher education. Whether it is general education or professional education, universities in China must reflect on whether the personnel training goal of current curriculum is too pursuit of secular and function.

See from the pertinence of higher education, general education emphasizes the inner world and stresses meeting the students' inner needs, but professional education emphasizes the external world and stresses meeting the social needs.[3] Therefore, the former believes that the core goal of the curriculum should be educating people, breaking through disciplinary boundaries in the competition of knowledge fragmentation and professionalism. The latter believes that the core goal is to teach students the professional knowledge and skills. There is an inevitable conflict in the popularity of higher education and the prevalence of pragmatism, but the two are not absolutely binary opposites.

At this stage, demand determinism defends the dominant position of professional curriculum in the university. But as the British educator Eric Ashby said, the way to civilization is through the mas

tery of a profession rather than by passing it. Under the current curriculum system, although general courses are vulnerable, but its spirit can integrate into the specialized courses so that students can receive both academic training and humanities education. General education is the last defending line in the era of specialization. Its ultimate goal is to promote the free and comprehensive development of human beings.

3.2. The Educational Content: Knowledge Transfer or Value Cultivation?

In the systematic construction of general curriculum system, we continue the traditional model. The main objective is teaching professional knowledge and skills. This causes the ideological basis and mind value of knowledge is forgotten in the process of teaching. Herbart warned people "the highest purpose of education is morality". Virtue itself is a kind of knowledge, but the proliferation of technological rationality greatly weakens its virtue, separating knowledge from virtue.

People's understanding of the curriculum has experienced three orientations: teaching materials, learning activities and learning experience. Among them, knowledge transfer has always been considered the main goal or "even the logical starting point of pedagogy".[4] Afterwards, due to the impact of industrialization, the course no longer focuses on what students learn, but more on what they can do and what they have done. But because of individual differences, "The meaning each student receives from the activity and the way of understanding is different.". So the course turned to learning experience orientation. Learning experience focuses on the interaction between students and the learning environment, which is the degree students actively participate in learning. It is a kind of psychological experience. The emphasis is on learning rather than teaching.

In teaching process, the value cultivation depends on the acquisition and accumulation of knowledge. But knowledge itself does not mean the formation of moral character and value. Since the core of education lies in educating, its effect should be presented by the learner. Hence, general education focuses on promoting life experience and personal growth. Systematic construction of general curriculum should not be confined to the external forms such as curriculum arrangement, structure, organization and management, but also the inherent logic and educational value.

3.3. The Value Philosophy: Value Spontaneous or Value Conscious?

There are two states of value: spontaneous and consciousness.

Value spontaneous means that the individual who does not have rational thinking instinctively draws value from life. Learn without knowing. Value consciousness means overcoming irrational thinking, combining immediate value and long-term value on the basis of learning, "pursuing the harmonious of society and nature, and pursuing the value that is conducive to the healthy and comprehensive development of human beings"[5]. General education is greatly influenced by the philosophy of value spontaneous, but it always has the intrinsic meaning of enlightening value consciousness.

Review the history of general education. It's not hard to find that every curriculum reform has its roots in different views of human value and different understandings of education connotation. In value orientation, the free education focuses on human permanence and intrinsic rational value; the progressive pragmatism education emphasizes human's variability and tool value; the eclecticism education attaches importance to the balance, stability and integrity of people. The historical change of value orientation is undoubtedly from value spontaneous to value conscious,[6] and finally towards the unify of the two.

4. The Thinking of General Curriculum Reform in Chinese University

In recent years, high-level universities at home and abroad are committed to the reform of general education. Stanford, Harvard, Tokyo and other universities have readjusted general education programs. The University General Education Alliance in China has attracted 44 universities. One of the more feasible options of general education reform in China, is to find a way to promote the balanced development of general ideal and practice, through the continuous exploration of the practice. This requires joint efforts by all parties.

Firstly, Government should nurture an external environment. Education develops in the context of responding to the call of the country and the times. We have realized that education is almost an appendage to the economy, under the mode of professional training education. It is harmful to society. Therefore, we hope to correct the deviation through general education. But higher education can hardly compete with the age of pragmatism and utilitarianism. The development of general education needs a good external environment, which needs strong government intervention.

The early development of general education in China, owes to the strong administrative intervention of the government. "In the field of expertise and professional services, the government is a dominant player", because it directly determines the social participation of other actors. In 1995, the department of higher education held a seminar named "strengthening the pilot work of cultural quality education in universities", which took general education as one of the main themes of higher education development. Moreover, through a series of administrative resolutions, cultural quality education has becoming an important content of education reform, which provides institutional guarantee for the vigorous development of general education. After that, with the popularization and internationalization, the role of government gradually change from the lead to the guide, providing space for colleges and universities to explore their own way.

Although all kinds of universities in China are rich in educational practice, but they are also trapped in a variety of values and conflicts at the same time. For example, whether the university should teach the student specialized skill or educates them to understand the life significance and social responsibility. Under the strong impact of instrumental and technical rationality, some universities gradually deviate from the initial heart of education: replace the basic education with economic benefits, replace the educational task with academic pursuit, replace value guidance with knowledge transfer. In this environment, students seem to be examination machines, tech geeks or economic animals, becoming what Mr Qian Liqun calls "delicate egoists". Under the situation of conflict between the whole ecological environment and the thought of general education, the government needs to play its role and stimulate all the promoters to make this joint effort. The functions are irreplaceable.

Secondly, teachers, textbooks and teaching methods may be the three breakthroughs. In order to overcome the problems and challenges in the current curriculum system, it is necessary to rethink the institutionalization and teaching practice of general courses in universities.

Teachers are the core elements of curriculum reform. The western mature experience is the ideal general courses are offered by masters or teachers with the potential of masters. In our country, teachers with junior qualifications are the main providers of general courses, whose urgent need is to obtain academic recognition through scientific projects, academic papers, funds in the instrumental-oriented evaluation system. In terms of the input-output ratio of research and teaching, teaching input, especially the extra general curriculum input, is most likely to be discarded. Therefore, it is very important to build a diversified system of teacher evaluation and promotion to arouse teachers' enthusiasm to join in general courses.

Textbooks are the key elements of curriculum reform. General education is a kind of local knowledge, which can not break away from the meaning of social life.[7] Teaching material is the carrier of this local knowledge. Lu feikui, an Chinese educationist, once pointed out that the national streng

th lies in education and the education lies in textbook. The popularization of higher education has promoted the prosperity of textbook market. But there are still some problems, as the quality is uneven and the selection and management mechanism is imperfect. In particular, the general textbook is not included in the key textbook program of Marxist Theory Research and Construction, nor is there a strict screening procedure as in specialized courses. It is very urgent to publish general education textbooks with Chinese characteristics and cultural connotations, to establish a perfect system of textbook quality evaluation, and to perfect the selection and management mechanism.

Teaching method is an important factor of curriculum reform. The reform of general education will bring about the reform of teaching method. Taking promoting the individual development as the ultimate goal, means that students are the real main subject. The teaching process is not only knowledge transfer, but also value identification and value practice. It demands us change traditional method of knowledge transmission to students' value confusion and emotional need. Specific methods can be varied, for example, reading classic books. The key is to increase interaction between teachers and students, mobilize the students' initiative, cultivate innovative and explore mind, which are effective means to improve teaching effect. It shows that the success of general education reform needs the full attention of decision-making groups, the overall design of training programs and the full input of excellent teachers and supports. Altogether, it needs not only the theoretic demonstration, but also the practical trial and promotion, from the top level of system construction, course design, quality evaluation, to the basic level of establishing a social support network with broad participation. With the sustained drive of reform and a good public opinion environment, the general education could flourish in China.

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