

Research and Practice of Fulfilling General Education Concept in Vocational Colleges*

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Abstract—To cultivate students into “complete social and vocational persons”, vocational colleges have to strengthen the promotion of general education. As a kind of concept, general education should be fulfilled and developed in practice. Vocational colleges satisfy students’ demand of individual development through curriculum system construction, deepening of teaching reform and innovation of talent cultivation mode, to enable students of vocational colleges to be “persons” with reasonable knowledge structure, professional vocational ability, rich emotions and high-brow style.

Keywords—vocational colleges; general education; reform

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocational education forms an important part of education system in colleges. In particular, the current higher vocational education has accounted for almost half of the higher education in China, playing an irreplaceable role in talent cultivation and national construction in the future. The UNESCO Report “Learning to Care: Education in 21st Century” points out that “the successful worker in the 21st century will be the people with overall development and open to new ideas and new opportunities.” Exploring how to cultivate the workers into “people with overall development” is a new question faced by vocational education development. Successful workers are not merely those who understand technology and master skills, but also the people of innovative thinking, open ideas and concepts, taste and happy life. Therefore, vocational colleges should strengthen the promotion of general education, and satisfy students’ demand of individual development through curriculum system construction, deepening of teaching reform and innovation of talent cultivation mode, which will enhance students’ accomplishment of knowledge and culture in an all-round way, so that they can obtain a relatively reasonable knowledge structure; offer students the training of basic vocational ability, so that they can obtain an reasonable ability structure; and cultivate the abundant and elegant taste of students, so that they can become a qualified “person” and even one with high-brow style. It is the call of the times and the trend of education

reform for vocational colleges to strengthen general education in the new century.

II. GENERAL EDUCATION IS A KIND OF CONCEPT

The idea of general education goes back to ancient times with rich and profound connotation. The Chinese ancient Confucian pays attention to require students to master “six arts”: rites, music, archery, charioteering, reading and writing, and arithmetic, requiring students to have an all-round development. The Doctrine of Mean, one of Confucius classics, advocates “being erudite, interrogated, with careful reflection, clear discrimination, and perseverance”. The Analects of Confucius advocates “being learned and persistent, inquiring with earnestness and reflecting with self-application”. Ancient people pay attention to cultivate students’ morality of combining learning and thinking, the unity of knowing and doing, and having intelligence, benevolence and courageousness, to achieve the talent cultivation target of “all-rounder”. In the history of Chinese contemporary college education, the principle of “embracing classics, enlisting various schools, with free thinking and thought of all-inclusive” proposed by Cai Yuanpei, and the college education concept of “common knowledge is the foundation, specialty is the least important” put forward by Mei Yiqi, former president of Tsinghua University, as early as the 1920s-1930s, are the specific reflection of general education idea in university.

“通识教育 (Tōng shí jiàoyù)” is the translation of general education, and some other scholars translate it into “一般教育 (ordinary education)” or “通才教育 (all-round person education)”. General education considers “all-round person education”, adheres to the cultivation concept with “personality molding, knowledge learning, ability exercising” as the core content, which improves students’ accomplishment of knowledge and culture in an all-round way, offers students the training of fundamental abilities, and cultivates the abundant and elegant taste of students, so that they can become a qualified “person” and even one with high-brow style.

With the rise of general education worldwide, people have deepened their understanding of college education concept, and their recognition of general education gradually tends to be identical, namely taking quality education as the center of education, to cultivate the all-round personality.

*Fund project: One of the research achievements of teaching reform and research project of Beijing Vocational College of Agriculture “Research and Practice of Interactive Teaching Mode of Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Basic Law Education in Higher Vocational Colleges” (Project No.: 2017026).

III. STRENGTHENING THE PROMOTION OF GENERAL EDUCATION BY VOCATIONAL COLLEGES IS THE TREND OF REFORM

Xiong Qinian pointed out in the article "Concept and Practice of General Education" published in China Education Daily (September 15, 2014) that, the mission of general education in domestic colleges bears more, that is, to return to the natural value of college education, overcome the disadvantages of narrow utilitarianism, break through the professional barrier that is divided too much, eliminate the harmful effects of examination-oriented education, so as to cultivate the specialized talents with sound mentality, profound accomplishments, open horizon and thorough knowledge, and are good at studying and have the courage to make innovation." After many years of exploration and practice, the common view has been reached in terms of importance and necessity of general education reform in colleges in China, and important progress has been gained in theoretical research and specific practice of general education. However, vocational colleges make the position of general education in vocational education unset, just like the clock pendulum.

A. Necessity for Vocational Colleges to Strengthen General Education

The collusion between multiple cultures brought by globalization makes strengthening general education by vocational colleges urgent; the specialized education mode in vocational colleges in China needs the emergence of general education. The development of social production changes rapidly, with old jobs disappearing and new jobs emerging. The changes in specialties of vocational education can no longer keep pace with the change of social occupations. The cultivation of students' ordinary ability is more effective than specialization to cope with changes of jobs. The current industrial upgrading and innovative society construction requires vocational education to cultivate the talents who have in-depth understanding of human nature, market and society. However, for a long time, the vocational education in China is regarded as cultivation of vocational skills of the educated, providing skill-oriented talents for economic society, paying attention to students' skill training, while neglecting their personality molding and common knowledge cultivation. In the era of knowledge economy, a single skill may not be beneficial all one's life, so the educated have to learn the fundamental knowledge and ability with "universality", and this is mainly completed through general education in schools. As a result, the basic concept of general education in vocational colleges should include three aspects of basic contents: the first is "common knowledge", to break through discipline barriers and bring specialty and fundamental knowledge together and understand thoroughly; the second is "learned and elegant", paying more attention to people's temperament, interest and taste beyond professional cultivation; the third is "all-round person for society and occupation", namely "all-rounder", realizing healthy development of personality and all-round development of people. He Huaiyuan, the professor of Nanjing Institute of Political Science of Chinese People's Liberation Army, proposed that, "mastering many skills while specializing in one" should be the basic

orientation for the cultivation of higher talents under the environment of increasingly finer of division of labor, and talents need to have extensive knowledge accumulation, broad horizon and the ability to adapt to multiple jobs beyond the specialty. Modern China requires the successful labor to have firm political conviction, high-brow moral state, strong working ability, personality charm, innovative spirit and learning ability.

B. Difficulties in the Actual Environment

General education is carried out in many countries and regions of the world, and its concept and value are accepted by more and more schools. This is an unarguable fact. However, the promotion of general education faces a lot of problems and challenges in the actual environment of vocational education development in mainland China. The largest one is people's resistance against cultural concept. Boas points out in the book *The Mind of Primitive Man* that, it is cultural factors instead of genetic factors that determine human's behavioral habit. Customs, social ideology, ethics and morality are cultural characteristics. They are stable and long-lasting, and settle in people's mind, influencing people's different behaviors by shaping people's subjective model. More and more people hold the opinion that vocational colleges are merely preparing for the future vocation and they are the places for vocational skills cultivation, so general education is regarded as "useless education". The pursuit and comparison of employment objectives become a fashion of the society, and such individual and actual utility pursuit is strengthened under the environment of long-term economic depression. Some vocational colleges invest resources into specialty construction and tend to offer the education and courses which are conducive to their employment to cater to the needs of students as customers. This is related to the positioning of vocational education, namely what kind of people on earth does vocation education plan to cultivate, the labors mastering certain technologies and skills and meeting the requirements of a post, or the "complete social and vocational person". Therefore, the contradictions and dilemma of general education in vocational colleges are reflected in the following aspects: its importance cannot be affirmed in terms of ideological level or concept; with respect to the aspect of practice, the contradictions and conflicts between it and specialty reflect in various aspects, being weakened, neglected and marginalized.

IV. VOCATIONAL COLLEGES CARRY OUT THE IDEA OF GENERAL EDUCATION IN AN ALL-ROUND WAY BY INTEGRATION OF KNOWING AND DOING

The cultivation goal of vocational colleges is to cultivate "complete social and vocational person", and this requires schools to combine the foreign advanced concept with the local actual conditions of the school while carrying out the general education concept, to construct the localized general education mode, cultivation objectives, curriculum system and standards with the features of vocational colleges.

A. *Paying Attention to the Study of General Education Theory, and Practicing the Concept of School-running of General Education*

An idea is a concept, the rational thinking of people toward objective things and the guiding ideology of people's behavior. Socrates believes that "idea exists in nature as a model", and idea determines future. David Hume also said that people are governed by benefits, but benefits and all things of human are governed by idea. We can find by taking a view of the history that almost all the great reforms are caused by ideas. As a result, the reform of general education in vocational colleges is bound to be led by the reform of general education concept, and enhance the recognition of general education connotation and meaning further, so we should understand and treat the relationship between general education and professional education dialectically from education concept and content, and talent cultivation mode. The idea of general education is specific and live, and it is the soul, individuality and quality of a school, reflecting the understanding and pursuit of colleges toward talent cultivation. The objectives of general education should reflect school's development mission, and sufficient argumentation should be made for the quality requirements of school's talent cultivation objectives. Various vocational colleges should establish appropriate objective of general education in combination with school-running level, type and characteristics of this school, to make general education concept run through the whole talent cultivation education. We should guide students to establish the concept of overall development and enhance the position of general education in the mind of students.

B. *Strengthening the Extent of General Education Reform and Innovating Talent Cultivation Mode Constantly*

1) *Constructing scientific and reasonable curriculum system of general education:* The core of strengthening general education and improving vocational college students' humanistic accomplishments and innovative ideology and ability is to establish the scientific and reasonable curriculum system. Therefore, the barrier between general courses and professional courses and that between various disciplines should be broken, to build up a number of resources for cross- and comprehensive general course, and to achieve mastery of foundation and specialty, humanistic and scientific knowledge. General education should not only stress the basic and comprehensive content, but also lay emphasis on the fusion and understanding of system, serving both the specialty and overall development of students.

2) *Basing upon the cultivation of "all-rounder education", paying attention to increase resources for general optional courses:* The setting of general optional courses should be scientifically demonstrated and systematically designed around the talent cultivation concept of cultivating "complete social and vocational person" of vocational colleges; make full use of the vocational colleges' discipline and specialty advantages to construct a number of optional courses of general education in a planned way and make clear the management responsibilities of teachers of this college; the

school should publish incentive policies and mobilize teachers' enthusiasm to open general optional courses by improving the subsidy of public optional courses, giving priority to construction fund, educational reform and project approval and taking it as the basis of annual assessment, promotion and evaluation; the Erya online courses should be introduced in or to invite the social celebrities, experts of the industry and well-know professors of comprehensive university to come to offer general optional courses according to the actual teaching demand and students' needs while tapping the potential of this school's teachers.

C. *Improving the Evaluation Standard of General Education Around Its Cultivation Concept*

The effective teaching quality supervision is the basic defense line for improving teaching quality, which cannot be loosened at any time. Standard is the scale, requirement, base line. The talent cultivation program should be revised around the education concept of "molding personality, learning knowledge and exercising ability" on the basis of abiding by relevant requirements and quality standards of the school's management document, to improve teaching plan arrangement, curriculum outline formulation, curriculum teaching organization, curriculum assessment and achievement evaluation and the quality standards of other links, so as realize seamless connection and normative management of various links of quality and operation.

D. *Standardizing Conventional Education and Teaching Management, and Enhancing Classroom Teaching Quality Constantly*

Adhere to the principle of governing education by law and strengthen classroom teaching management. Make the visiting of a class normal by multiple forms including random visiting by leaders from the college and department, and mutual visiting among the colleagues; carry out classroom teaching quality evaluation activities by online teaching evaluation, attending the lecture, interview with student messenger, student forum and questionnaire on the basis of classroom teaching quality evaluation standard, to promote teachers to summarize teaching experience and enhance their teaching level and ability; take initiative to participate in excellent class competition and competition of teaching PPT making by multimedia organized by the school for young and middle-aged teachers, to give play to the role of demonstration and driving, and create good atmosphere for teachers to learn from each other.

E. *Performing the Student Management Well to Promote Students to Grow Up Healthily and Emerge As a Talent*

Education of person is the foundation, and moral education should come first. We should always regard the formative education as the cornerstone of moral education of vocational colleges. Formative education is inseparable from restriction of specifications. Colleges should formulate rules and regulations in combination with talent cultivation objectives of general education on the basis of implementing management rules and regulations of school, students and academic performance. In

the process of general education, the education theme and content should be designed with targeted plan, and carry out corresponding education using education carrier, to strive to achieve the effect of all-round education of person.

V. CONCLUSION

Great virtue carries extensive learning, careful reflection generates innovation. The fulfillment of general education concept is the strategic planning for overall construction and development of vocational colleges, which is of far-reaching influence and important significance. Vocational colleges should attach importance to it, plan it elaborately and implement it seriously, so as to deliver the excellent and profound cultural resources of China and foreign countries to college students, and offer them the spiritual nutrition which benefits them all their life.

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