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Editors

Doing Liberal Arts Education

The Global Case Studies

 Springer

Series Editor's Foreword

This is a fascinating book on liberal arts education. For a long time, liberal arts education has been regarded as the ideal type of progressive education in America: a small college with intimate relationship between teachers and students; pedagogies more characterized by tuition and dialogue than lectures; a process of education that pursues liberty, autonomy, independent thinking, critical thinking, and freedom of thought; and a holistic curriculum that aims to provide multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary education on the one hand but also encourages students to pursue their own academic interests that normally would not be available in the structured and programmatic university curriculum. Overall, liberal arts education nurtures liberated and autonomous individuals, and this has always been associated with the traditional progressive education, especially in America.

This book provides state-of-the-art development of liberal arts education beyond America and in many parts of the world. In this book, you can find examples of liberal arts colleges in many other countries, such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Bangladesh, and the Netherlands. While traditional liberal arts education oftentimes was focused on the quality of the individuals to be developed from the college programs, this book reports on the latest liberal arts education that is responding to the today's changing needs, not only in America but in the varied countries and cultural contexts where the liberal arts colleges are established. The liberal arts colleges reported in this book, without exception, respond to the call of today: how they respond to the needs of the 21st knowledge economy, how they develop talents who are well equipped to contribute to the globalizing world, being responsive and adaptive to the ever-changing situations, providing creative solutions to new problems that cannot be learned from school, being open to diversities and making the best out of it, and, last but not least, having intercultural sensitivity, communicative abilities, and the capability of working with different peoples who are increasingly doing business in various parts of the globe, as all-time movers (migrants), rather than local people who stationed in one place for long.

This book is an intercultural dialogue in itself, as it expounds on how peoples from different cultures run liberal arts college. These liberal arts colleges, built outside America, are trying to establish progressive colleges that can integrate into

their local cultures. The value of these colleges showcases not only how it can be possible to offer progressive education in different cultures but also how to elicit the progressiveness of their own cultures as the ground for creating progressive education with cultural characteristics. Thus, we can find different versions of liberal arts colleges in this book, which all have progressive education in mind, but accommodative to the unique cultural context, and coming up with different creative versions of liberal arts education.

There are more attractive features in this book than I can mention here in this Foreword. To conclude, I would like to highlight that many of the liberal arts colleges place strong emphasis on diversity as the key value of today's liberal arts colleges. The diversity mentioned in these colleges not only refers to cultural diversity but also learning diversity. One of the very impressive colleges even takes "learning with difficulties" as the key diversity in this college. The college not only invests strenuous efforts and resources to help the students with learning difficulties, but what is really touching is that they try to correct our concepts toward these learners that their learning difficulties are only part of the diversities that we have to pay attention to. What's more, they try to identify their learning strengths in the process of helping their learning difficulties, and, congratulations to the college, they do find out beauties and strengths from these students. In this way, this college re-creates itself as a *liberal arts college* in liberating students with learning difficulties and corrects the concept of learning difficulties. They redefine learning difficulty as a kind of diversity that we have often ignored. As much as we can learn from cultural differences, we can also learn from learning diversities.

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Foreword

Education in the tradition of the liberal arts, while described by some as “American-style” education, is a truly global approach to higher learning. With roots in Ancient Greece, it was first codified near the end of the Roman era by a North African, Martianus Capella. After hundreds of years of gestation in that world region, with contributions from South and East Asia during the Islamic Golden Age, it was ultimately reintroduced to Europe. For nearly 800 years, liberal arts study was the standard in Europe, and this approach was taken to North America with English colonists who founded some of the first collegiate institutions on that continent, including places we now know as Harvard and Yale. Study in the liberal arts tradition would have been the multinational higher education standard had it not been for the desire of a Prussian king in the early 1800s to have an approach to education which would strengthen his reign through the education of bureaucrats and other specialists. Higher education became redefined as specialized training, and the liberal arts was displaced. The royalty of other European nations also accepted these Prussian assumptions and adopted specialized higher education as the new standard, and since this was also the era of global European colonialism, specialized higher education was exported around the world where it eliminated not only liberal arts study but a number of more holistic indigenous approaches to education which predated the European influence.

However, the liberal arts approach – which characterizes education at the colleges represented in this volume – was not eliminated in what was then the new nation of the USA. It was the faculty of Yale University who rejected the assumptions and methods of specialization, not only describing in some detail why a liberal arts education was more important than ever but also asserting, for the first time, that it should be available to all people, not merely the select few. They declared that the advancement of civil society and the success of a nation required deep and personal engagement with the full range of human knowledge and experience. If specialization was desired, it should follow after a liberal arts degree. So the Prussian/European approach of a specialized or professional first higher education degree was rejected in the early USA.

Beginning in the mid-1800s, but far more extensively in recent decades, societal leaders in many nations, concluding that their countries were being disadvantaged by the “standard” specialization approach to higher education, created new liberal arts-based institutions. They adapted liberal arts approaches to the national, cultural, societal, and religious contexts of their own nations. The universities represented by authors in this volume – from Japan, Korea, Bangladesh, India, Singapore, and the Netherlands – were founded and now educate in this way.

What does a society, and national progress, lose when a higher education is virtually entirely specialized in nature? Bruce Kimball, in his book *Orators and Philosophers* (Kimball, 1995), describes two different liberal arts traditions which originally emerged in ancient Greece and which have persisted in the millennia since that time. One emphasizes the importance of learning to use an open-minded and analytical mode of inquiry; the other emphasizes the learning of competencies necessary for effective citizenship. It is the combination of these educational purposes which characterizes liberal arts education today – an education which prepares students with the intellectual abilities and societal capacities to contribute to, and be successful in, a globally engaged milieu, a type of learning that is missing when a higher education provides only narrow, specialized or professional, knowledge.

Although much more can be said about the philosophy and content of education in the tradition of the liberal arts, that is not the purpose of this volume. The goal of this book is to provide practical and concrete information on how to deliver a liberal arts education most effectively. While much has been written on this topic within a single national/cultural setting (most often the USA), the editors have thoughtfully engaged experienced liberal arts practitioners from universities from a number of different nations to describe how liberal arts goals can be accomplished in very different national and cultural contexts.

There are many ways in which this volume makes important contributions to our understanding of effective educational approaches. First, by describing liberal arts education as it is adapted and applied in a range of colleges and universities in many countries, it becomes clear that education in the tradition of the liberal arts is truly a global phenomenon. It may no longer be claimed as “distinctly American” as some have described it in recent years. Second, it is also clear that we are in a time when we all, regardless of which nation we are in, have much to learn from the initiatives and programs which have been designed and implemented worldwide. We must all move beyond a tendency to look first or only at the ways universities in our own nations develop and apply liberal arts programs.

Finally, by looking at liberal arts initiatives as they have been thought about in other national and cultural contexts, as was the case with the observations of Alexis de Tocqueville about American society two centuries ago, we gain new insights into our own ways of approaching educational strategies. A compelling insight along this line is volume editors’ Mikiko Nishimura and Toshiaki Sasao final chapter, in which they conclude that “experiential learning is the most effective and popular way to embody ideals of liberal arts education.” Although there are advocates for experiential learning at many institutions, the conclusion that its power transcends

national and cultural boundaries raises it to a different level of significance: it is not merely the preferred approach of some subset of academics, it is a method of broad importance and impact for liberal arts education. While, as they further describe, it may be the most difficult methodology to use effectively, and there is no one design which works well in all places, they do describe seven important, specific, guidelines for the effective design and implementation of experience-based pedagogies in multicultural/multinational contexts.

The Lessons of History is a slender volume written many years ago by two historians, Will and Ariel Durant. They attempted to summarize all of human history as earlier described in their 11-volume *Story of Civilization*. In their uplifting conclusion, they express their belief that it is the responsibility of each generation to ensure that its best knowledge and wisdom is passed on to the next generation, and this must happen for humanity to progress constructively:

Civilization is not inherited; it has to be learned and earned by each generation anew; if the transmission should be interrupted for one century, civilization would die, and we should be savages again... Consider education not as the painful accumulation of facts and dates and reigns, nor merely the necessary preparation of the individual to earn his keep in the world, but as the transmission of our mental, moral, technical, and aesthetic heritage as fully as possible to as many as possible, for the enlargement of man's understanding, control, embellishment, and enjoyment of life... If progress is real despite our whining, it is not because we are born any healthier, better, or wiser than in the past, but because we are born to a richer heritage, born on a higher level of that pedestal which the accumulation of knowledge and art raises as the ground and support of our being. (Durant & Durant, 1986, pp. 101–102)

This is the story of the education provided by colleges and universities which educate in the tradition of the liberal arts: advancing humanity by applying the most effective methods of developing breadth of intellect, understanding, knowledge, and experience in ways which benefit the common good.

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