College Talent Cultivation Model Reform: Transcending Its Predicament

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Keywords: Talents Cultivation Model, Problems, Countermeasures.

Abstract. With the rapid development of higher education and a surge in college enrollment rate, higher education in China is undertaking changes in quality, level, structure and administration. In this context, talent cultivation model is becoming more diverse and complicated. To escape from cultivation model reform predicament and to constantly improve teaching quality, measures must be taken to overcome the inherent inertia of talent cultivation model, to prevent the tendency of cultivation convergence, to infuse talent cultivation with humanity care and concern, and to strike a balance between teaching and research.

Introduction

Against the background of rapid higher education development in China, examination of and reflection over the changes taking place in the process of mass higher education will be contributive to overcome the inherent inertia of talent cultivation model, prevent the tendency of cultivation convergence and the improvement of teaching quality.

With the rapid development of higher education and a surge in college enrollment rate, higher education in China is undertaking changes in quality, level, structure and administration. In April 2012, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council printed and distributed The Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Program for Talent Development (2010-2020). The program features on the concept of "taking human beings as the essential" and the diversification and multi-stratification of talent demands, reflecting new requests on higher education talent cultivation. Thus, against the background of rapid higher education development in China, examination of and reflection over the changes taking place in the process of mass higher education will be contributive to the transcendence of reform predicament and the improvement of teaching quality.

Overcome the Inherent Inertia of Talent Cultivation Model

Talent cultivation model is referred to as a “model” because of its prescriptiveness and normativeness. However, prescriptiveness and normativeness may give rise to inertia, which will make every effort to maintain its unique features and hence fight against changes. Bearing this in mind will facilitate the construction of a more rational talent cultivation model, more flexible and inclusive, tolerant to individual students’ personality and strength, and adaptive to industry development concerned.

At present, China is making an economic transition. In market economy, competing
for survival and exchange of equal value are the fundamental principles in life, and people’s spiritual intent is profit-oriented. Such shock brought by market economy has led to many conflicts in the field of education, to name a few, the conflict between utilitarianism and idealism in terms of talent qualities, the conflict between the basics and application in terms of knowledge structure, the conflict between ethics and economics in terms of education relationship. Faced with all these conflicts, what shall we do?

As for students, the competition mechanism of market economy on the one hand will train them to be pragmatic and raise their competition awareness, but on the other hand drive them to be utilitarian and profit-motivated, hence losing their interest in pursuing values and qualities of humanities and sciences. For instance, when choosing a job from a number of opportunities, college graduates tend to prioritize their goals according to the following: first, economic income and working location; second, playing his/her strengths; at last, meeting the need of the country.

With regard to colleges and universities, major conflicts are found in antitheses between quality education and vocational education, basic education and applied education, theory education and practice education. Profit-oriented education features on stressing practical functions and effects, leaving education entirely guided by invisible hand of the market. The danger of profit-oriented education is looming large in recent tendencies of “emphasizing application and belittling basics, emphasizing skills and belittling qualities, emphasizing practice and belittling theory” and utilitarian concerns in major setting. According to some insiders, newly setup programs can be divided into a few types on the basis of their purposes: First, to-gain-students type, i.e. aiming at recruiting as many students as possible. New programs are set up and knotted together like thin threads woven into a fishing net. The bigger the net, and the smaller the grid on the net, the more fish it can catch. To weave such a net quickly, schools usually favor the so-called “soft majors”, supported by no more than a couple of books and a few teachers, featured by small investment but quick turnover, and refrain from the so-called “hard majors” such as engineering technology, digital controlled lathe, mechanical electronics, which demand heavy investment in facilities and instruments; Second, to-disperse-employment-pressure type, i.e., aiming at reducing the employment pressure caused by too many students taking the same major, schools break up the whole into parts, which is in fact to reduce their own pressure rather than that of the market; Third, to follow-the-tradition type, i.e., majors based on old resources; Fourth, to-meet-the market type, i.e., setting up whatever programs that meet the needs of market without regard to their employment prospects. A research by Fellow Lu Li at Shandong Academy of Social Sciences shows that, during the years from 1990 to 2004, engineering graduates had increased by 11%, economics graduates by 13%, law graduates by 19% on average every year. At present, the supply of graduates with arts, history, philosophy, education and law degrees already exceeds the demand. These are negative impacts brought by the profit-orientation of market economy, running counter to the ideal of constructing rational higher education talent cultivation model.

Prevent the Tendency of Cultivation Convergence

Currently, the constraints and limitations on talent cultivation model come from ideational, institutional and resource factors. In terms of ideation, they are manifested in failure to explore and develop one’s own ideas of running a school and to attach due importance to the fundamental task of educating people, overemphasizing
hardware-condition investment and ignoring software-condition construction, overstressing the extension of school scale and neglecting the improvement of school-running ideas. In terms of institution, they are seen in power imbalance and dislocation between internal managements as well as imbalance between administrative power and academic power, which demotivates teachers’ participation in education and teaching reforms and undermines reformation and innovation in talent cultivation model. In terms of resource, the surge in university enrollment leads many universities to large-scale physical expansion and even to the establishment of several new campuses, which curtails running-school funds, depletes investment in teaching and teacher team building, and seriously enervates teachers’ motivation and drive for talent cultivation model reform. Therefore, when learning other countries’ experience, we must pay attention to differences of contexts and warn against mechanical copying. As is known, the vitality of talent cultivation model lies right in its uniqueness and peculiarity. Though the decrease of single-subject colleges and the increase of comprehensive universities provide precious opportunities for cultivating interdisciplinary versatile talents, attention must be paid to discriminate discipline differences. Over-popularizing a single model will lead to a new type of convergence, which then will cause new black holes in education resources waste. Neither is it possible for one university to offer all disciplines available, nor for a university to keep all disciplines at the same level. Higher education institutions must blaze their own path by making the best of their resources while keeping high awareness of do’s and don’ts. As for the goals of talent cultivation and institution development, attention must be paid not to seek “tall, big and perfect” but to seek breakthroughs in knowledge structure and ability system by assembling limited resources and targeting regional economic and social need. “Do” means closely relating to reality and following market need and fostering one’s own characteristics and hence advantages. “Don’t” means preventing detachment from reality and avoiding competing others’ strengths with one’s own drawbacks.

**Infuse Talent Cultivation with Humanity Care and Concern**

Talent cultivation model is the most dynamic, most vibrant and at the same time most complicated among all the subsystems of the “talent cultivation” system [1]. Further, as human potential is tremendous, the key lies in how to fully tap it. In a general sense, talent cultivation model is intrinsically in conflict with individuality development. How to resolve this conflict is of crucial importance to talent model construction.

The cultivation models currently adopted generally share typical industrial features: standardized mass production—schools, majors, curriculums, education and teaching process all follow strict guidelines, centering on classroom teaching and teacher lecturing—characterized by teacher-centered, textbook-centered, courses, textbooks, syllabuses and examinations standardized collective teaching. However, what we are facing is a knowledge-centered society. The development of knowledge economy will not only cause earthshaking changes in social economic structure, but also considerable changes in wanted talent structure. What the society needs are not longer standardized graduates without unique characters but high-quality and innovative talents with personal features. Knowledge economy will change the way people think and live—to receive education is not only out of the need of acquiring knowledge but also out of the need of improving one’s qualities, developing and perfecting oneself. Therefore, the function of higher education will turn to twofold by meeting consumption in addition to simply cultivating talents. The rational talent cultivation model that we have built is
able to perform the above two functions well. The implementation of such a model must be based on the human-center principle, which is the essence of education; the value of modern education reform and development ideas, the starting point and the finish point of education work. Human-centeredness asks us to bind education with the happiness, freedom, dignity and value of a human being, making education the education of humans. Higher education teaching model, anchored on the human-center principle, then must change to student-centered and teacher-directed individualized education, fully valuing the development of students’ personalities and abilities, respecting students’ own choices by diversifying, individualizing and democratizing education methods. The arrangement of teaching contents, the choices of teaching methods, and the management of teaching affairs must depart from students’ knowledge structure, psychological stage and social environment.

**Strike a Balance between Teaching and Research**

Teaching and research are interrelated and complementary to each other. High-level research guarantees high-quality teaching. Without high-level research, teaching will be a building on an unstable foundation. On the other side, teaching avail itself of advanced research results to convey the most updated knowledge to students. The rapid development of modern communication technology and computer networking technology has been increasingly employed in teaching, contributing to education in a newest and fastest way. Here lies the problem of inheritance and development: teachers, being researchers of new technologies as well as conveyers of knowledge, experience the mutual promotion and benefit of research and teaching. The teaching ability and research ability of the faculty are crucial parameters when rating a university, as strong research foundation imparts students with solid strength, while excellent teaching empowers research with vitality.

However, it is quite commonplace that research is often outweighed over teaching. For instance, academic promotion hinges strongly on the number of publications and the number and level of research projects, while one’s efforts invested in teaching innovation or curriculum reform and cultivating students are seldom taken into serious account. Even teachers are divided into “research-oriented” and “teaching-oriented” types, and the pay and benefits for the former are much better that those of the latter. Such tendency, if let it be, will definitely hinder the improvement of teaching quality, and exert negative influence on the implementation of our talent cultivation strategies. In fact, “In the process of cultivating competent talents for our society, both teaching and research are indispensible as they are supplementary to each other. Their cooperation and coordination are essential to improving teaching quality and cultivating competent talents” [2]. Therefore, colleges and universities should invite masters to join them and show their charm in the classes and to the students.

**Conclusion**

As its goal is to improve the quality of talent cultivation, talent cultivation model should unfold closely around the question of how to improve talent cultivation quality—the key determining higher education quality. Against the problems and predicaments that China’s talent cultivation model is faced with in the transition period, higher education institutions should adhere to education value, design plausible and feasible cultivation systems, construct more open and pluralistic talent cultivation model, and cultivate more high-level talents with innovation awareness and creative abilities.
References
