

Cross-cultural Education and the Cultivation of Innovative International Talents

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Abstract: China needs more innovative international talents to support its international development strategy in a long run. Cross-cultural education shoulders the important mission of enhancing cross-cultural understanding, improving cross-cultural literacy, and cultivating innovative international talents. Traditional education is often based on knowledge imparting and passive learning. The cultivation of innovative international talents needs to go beyond knowledge imparts, take thinking practice as the core. The essay sets the "seven key points" as targets, and "SMART" as the model to achieve the cultivation of international innovative talents through the cross-cultural education of "internationalization at home".

Keywords: Cross-cultural Education; Innovative International Talents; Cultivation Targets; "SMART" model; internationalization at home

1. Theoretical sources of cross-cultural education

As early as 30 years ago, UNESCO issued a guiding document on cross-cultural education ----- "On Contribution of Education to Cultural Development" at the International Conference on Education sponsored by UNESCO. According to the document, cross-cultural is "about the recognition and understanding of different cultures, and the establishment of positive and effective communication, mutual integration and enriching relations among various symbiotic cultures in the same country and among different cultures in the world." Cross cultural education, on the other hand, should be undertaken to "promote respect for cultural diversity, enhance international understanding, and make it possible to abandon all kinds of exclusion, with the purpose of promoting dialogue among civilizations and cultural integration".

The author believes that cross-cultural education is the education about the cultural diversity or differences of other human groups being exposed to learners in a certain human group, and its purpose is to improve learner's awareness of coexistence of various cultural groups and enhance their cross-cultural understanding. It is aimed to cultivate intercultural literacy of the learners to understand and respect cultural diversity; enable them to critically analyze, compare, accept, learns from and avoids different cultural phenomena until effective cross-cultural exchanges are reached, so as to build a much more harmonious international community.

2. The Cultivation Philosophy of Innovative International Talents

International talents should have a broad international vision and excellent cross-cultural literacy, and are able to use at least one foreign language skillfully to participate in international business exchanges and cooperation in relevant industries and fields. As we all know, Innovative talents are those who go beyond the traditional knowledge acquisition and skill training, and who get considerable training in thinking and creativity. Cultivating innovative international personnel, a comparatively free and individualized environment since it serves better the purpose of protecting students' curiosity while stimulating students' imagination and creativity. Tap students' potential, develop diversified talents, and actively guide students to develop higher value orientation to avoid short-term utilitarianism is also of pivotal importance.

The following seven points should be the targets of innovative international talents cultivation. Firstly, develop students' consciousness of global citizenship and moral responsibility, enhance the coexistence awareness of diversified cultures effectively and inspire them to play a part in promoting social development. Secondly, equip them with strong oral and written expression skills; make sure they have adequate etiquette and communication skills, so as that they could communicate freely in different occasions. Thirdly, develop students independent thinking and critical analysis skills, so that they can keep to themselves in any changing circumstances and make objective evaluation on different things. Fourth, train students to be courageous in exploration, good at questioning, pioneering and innovative, and tireless in finding answers and pursuing the truth. Fifth, Cultivate students' love for art, develop their ability to develop creative ideas with artistic aesthetics, thus they could generate creative ideas by combining their major course knowledge with artistic solutions. Sixth, equip students with strong team spirit, organizational and planning ability, resource coordination and leadership skills, as well as resilience and flexibility. Lastly, ensure students have interdisciplinary and cross-professional awareness; stimulate their innovative thinking through multi-disciplinary integration with multi-perspectives integrated.

3. Exploration of cross-cultural centered international innovative talents cultivation

3.1 21 Century "Internationalization at home"

Before the 21st century, the realization path of the cultivation of international innovative talents was mainly reflected in the cross-

border flow of a certain number of students. As we all know, the cost of cross-border mobility is extremely high. Only a small group of people with sufficient economic strength or superior academic strength can move, while the vast majority of people with average economic strength rarely have access to such opportunities. And this, to a certain extent, has led to the inequality of education. The study found that the internationalization of higher education has seen a boom in the past few decades, with more than 4 million students crossing borders each year, accounting for less than 2 percent of the total global enrollment.²

How to make the vast majority of students who cannot be exposed to the real situation of cross-cultural education and international learning to obtain similar opportunities? Several countries in Europe initiated the "internationalization at home" movement at the end of the 20th century. B.Nilsson defines the term "internationalization at home" as "any international-related activity other than the movement of students across borders; the purpose is to make internationalization embrace the whole university for the benefit of all teachers and students." According to J. Belen, "local internationalization" refers to "consciously incorporating international and cross-cultural dimensions into formal and informal curricula for all students in the domestic learning environment".⁴ As a new concept born in the process of higher education internationalization and on the contrary to traditional internationalization, "internationalization at home" has become a common choice for more higher education implementers to promote cross-cultural education and cultivate international innovative talents in the 21 century, especially in the post-epidemic era, due to its stronger universality and accessibility to the mass.

3.2 The advantages of "Internationalization at Home"

In China, the Outline of National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) has suggested that "All schools should innovate talent training mode by following the law of education and the natural law of talent development. Greater attention should be paid to train students' thinking by advocating heuristic, exploratory, discussion-based, participatory teaching so as to help students learn how to learn, stimulate their curiosity, tap their interests and hobbies by creating a good environment for independent thinking, free exploration and innovation.⁵ In response to this call, colleges and universities aiming at promoting "Internationalization at home" spare no efforts to integrate with the international community, introducing intercultural education to stimulate the overall development of students' personality by laying a general education foundation with solid professional knowledge and skills developed and strong international communication competence enhanced.

"Internationalization at home" emphasizes that students can receive international and cross-cultural education without going abroad. They could get their international horizons broadened and their cross-cultural literacy improved, so as to meet the needs of globalization development and grow up to be global citizens who can participate in global governance. Its most notable feature is that it can use information technology and Internet resources to combine international education with local education resources organically, give full play to the interactive effect of local and international two-way resource advantages in talent cultivation, and promote the internationalization of higher education in a more convenient, efficient and inclusive way. International citizens who come with both patriotism and global care could thus be prepared for the future society. The second characteristic is that "Internationalization at home" provides a reasonable and balanced curriculum combining international and national education content, the tendency of "completely internationalized" of traditional path of internationalization could be relieved, thus students could feel at ease no matter he or she choose to stay home or go abroad in the later course with less cultural shock or reentry shock. They could well adapt to any new environment, serving as a ferryman between different civilizations.

3.3 Introducing SMART model for "Internationalization at home"

The "SMART" model proposed by the author based on years of practice can provide a practical basis for the implementation of cross-cultural education and the training of international talents.



Figure 1 SMART Model

S is for Simulative, which means to create distinct international and multicultural campus environment identification through environmental simulation, so as to give learners a sense of immersive scene, so that they can automatically switch their own functions to the "international" mode. Specifically, environmental recognition (EI) and visual recognition (VI) can be used. EI refers to the planning and soft design of teaching areas and residential areas; including building names, decoration of indoor and outdoor spaces, as well as layout and

design of internal campus greenery, roads and landscape, make sure they are consistent with the spirit of international and cross-cultural education; VI starts from building the image system with college emblem, standard word and standard color as the core, so that the deep concept of the college is abstract-transformed into concrete symbol concept, and brings people a strong visual impact through personalized, standardized and systematic visual scheme.

M stands for integration, that is, the cultivation of international innovative talents should not stop at a single disciplinary or a certain vocational training, but to provide a wide range of courses, so that students can acquire a wide range of knowledge, so as to cultivate students' comprehensive ability. Facing the future, international innovative talents need to have the universality, transferability and flexibility that "a person can be competent for any position and master any subject easily". Therefore, efforts should be made to create an academic atmosphere of interdisciplinary integration from the aspects of discipline setting and faculty selection. In the same course, in the same class and on a same topic, multiple perspectives from different disciplines converge and blend, which will play a positive role in cultivating students' creative thinking effectively.

M simultaneously stands for Multi-dimensional, which means that besides the one-dimensional space of classroom, cross-cultural education and the cultivation of international innovative talents have more demands on the multidimensional extension of classroom, that is, multidimensional education activities outside the formal class situation. An extended class can be a combination of online and offline cultural exchange week between Chinese students and foreign students, in which cultural differences can be perceived and the awareness of diversity and coexistence of cross-cultural literacy can be enhanced. It can also be an online travel to exotic countries to experience foreign culture, further broaden international vision with the aid of modern information technology; it can also be a winter or summer camp experience. At the same time, attention should also be paid to the development of a considerable number of investigation, research, visit, intern, volunteer services and other practical opportunities since it is widely desired to put into practice to realize the unity of knowledge and skills. It is only in the interaction of real situations can students get the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction brought by effective communication; sometimes there might be frustration caused by inadequacy of knowledge and skills, and such frustration stimulates them to work harder to improve themselves.

A is for aggregation-building small academic communities with close integration of teachers and students through scale control. Small-scale education can enable each student to participate in various activities in the college, which is more conducive to the all-round development of students. The teacher-student ratio of no more than 1:20 can guarantee the close and frequent interaction between teachers and students and among peers so as to build a vibrant small international academic community. In contrast to the traditional university classroom, the class size of a locally internationalized college should be no more than 25 students, and students should receive as much attention and training opportunities as possible. A small class provides perfect environment for students to think critically and communicate effectively.

R is for Reshaping - that is, different colleges and universities should take into account students' actual situation, either introduce original materials and teach fully in English or implement bilingual teaching by introducing, learning from, combining and transforming into localized programs. From curriculum design to course arrangement, from teaching content to class organization, from assessment to evaluation, a whole set of remodeling of talent training from localization to internationalization is to be actualized.

Meanwhile, everyday teaching should also be subverted from teacher centered to student centered. Students active participation should be highly stressed to reconstruct the new teaching ecology centered on learning with a variety of teaching methods such as heuristic, inquiry, discussion, case analysis and other forms of interaction to promote the collision of multiple viewpoints with the interactive discussion between teachers and students as the core. With extremely frequent classroom reports, students' logical thinking and expression skills, communication and team collaboration skills could also be developed fully.

Accordingly, it is also a necessity to subvert the traditional assessment mode and reconstruct it into formative assessment with average performance being closely examined and an end term assessment as a supplementary. And the index could be varied from team work to individual report, form proposal to creative design etc to make sure students are not doing rote learning but creative learning.

T is for Team Building-- on the one hand, foreign teachers and full-time teachers with overseas study background should be employed to take charge of teaching; on the other hand, regular on-the-job training should be carried out for teachers to be cultivated with deeper understanding, broader vision, and more diversified skills to fulfill their role better. Teacher training is not limited to overall philosophy that broadens international horizons and improves cross-cultural literacy, nor is it limited to learning-centered teaching methodologies. It should also include how to act as a study advisor for students, how to become a star to illuminate students' growth path. At the same time, external links should also be establish with sufficient fund provided to support teachers to participate actively or even sponsor international academic seminars thus they could establish more academic exchange platforms for cross-cultural education and the cultivation of international and innovative talents, so that teachers can grow in an open and diversified environment.

To sum up, the society needs more international and innovative talents with cross-cultural literacy, and the cultivation of innovative international talents needs cross-cultural education. "Internationalization at home" is an ideal solution and the SMART model introduced can be of significance for the cultivation of innovative international talents, and it is more so in the post-epidemic era.

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