The Value of Vocational Education: An Example from the Department of Hospitality Management At National Taitung Junior College in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of my article is to discuss the position of vocational education – especially in Hospitality management – in changing parents’ thinking in Taiwan. I will try to discuss the position of vocational education in three areas which includes; giving an alternative way to enter university/college for those students who graduated from senior vocational high school, training teachers to implement new curricula that emphasize the development of both vocational knowledge and skills, and indirectly promoting hospitality industry growth in Taiwan.

INTRODUCTION

In Taiwan, there are now more than one hundred senior vocational high schools that have a department of Hospitality management, and over thirty private universities/colleges with newly opened departments of Hospitality during past three years. Some private colleges and universities announced that their students’ number couldn’t meet their fiscal requirement which means that there are still a lot of vacancies. If the total number of students couldn’t meet the fiscal requirement, why do they still open the new department?

Traditional Chinese thinking that “study” is the best and fastest way to get what you want. Parents hope their children to go to school -- junior high school, senior high school, university, and finally a good decent job (white-collar class), such as some government officer, an officer of some big company or to be a teacher. Chinese people think that blue-collar class people are for those persons who cannot finish their higher education or for less intelligent people. Parents think that is not suitable for their children even though they are blue-collar workers. Parents will do their best to support their children with money for continuing their studies if their children can enter some certain colleges or universities. Can western people imagine putting on a big banquet just for celebrating their children getting accepted to a university? Why do parents prefer to send their children to senior vocational high school than a normal high school? How does vocational education change parents’ mind?

The position of “Teacher” is an admirable and a respectable job in Taiwan. Chinese are being taught to respect their teachers even if the teacher only taught them once. Traditionally, teachers work within the classroom, and only present their knowledge through lectures. Can we guess who will teach such practical programs, such as cooking, to students? The answer is technician. Technicians are not teachers, they are someone who assistant teachers during practical programs. But for some monetary reasons, most private senior vocational high schools do not hire these technicians to assistant the teachers, private school teachers must teach both knowledge and skills to their students during the class by themselves. Teachers must rebuild their curricula to meet both financial and students’ requirements. Then, they have to do in-service education and go to some training centers for learning more skills and getting more confidence in teaching.

The economy is going down in Taiwan gradually, but the hospitality industry is growing day by day. Many entrepreneurs have moved to Mainland China. The failure rate gets higher yearly. In contrast with hospitality industries, there are lots of restaurants open and one hotel just joined the Inter-Continental Chain last year, the other changed her name from Lai-Lai Hotel into Sheraton hotel, Taipei, six months ago. Does that mean those hospitality industries will still be growing in the future? How could those hospitality industries make money while the other industries are facing the economic stress?
In education, our Chinese always follow the American way. Between tracking and detracting, there have been many disputes in America for a few years. The Taiwan government wants to follow in the American’s steps, but they forget what they have already done in the whole educational policy; “tracking”, since students studies in senior vocational high schools. This is quite different from American. Here, I would like to explain more on the background of vocational education – especially on the department of Hospitality management in Taiwan, related to the students’ background and what their parents’ thoughts are. In addition, a discussion about vocational education teachers, what their mission for their students is.

THE BACKGROUND OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION – ESPECIALLY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT IN TAIWAN

Technological and vocational education (TVE) has always played an extremely important role in the economic development of the Taiwan. In the 1950s, when domestic production was still-intensive, the teaching of entry-level competency at the junior high school level ensured there was sufficient manpower to meet demands. In the late 1960s, with production gradually becoming more-intensive, this system was abandoned as nationwide nine-year compulsory education came into effect. Senior vocational schools were developed, and junior colleges were established with the purpose of cultivating entry-level and mid-level technical/managerial skills.

By the early 1970s, the transition to a skill-intensive production system was complete, and industry was moving into the capital-intensive phase. As result, the labor market faced an increased demand for personnel with well-developed managerial and leadership abilities. It was at this time that the first institute of technology was founded to give senior vocational school and junior college graduates opportunities for further education.

Reflecting the demands of social changes and in accordance the raising of hospitality industries, the department of F&B is setting out to meet the trend requirements. The first F&B department was built in 1990 in a Taipei county senior vocational high school. From 1990 to 2002, there were over 122 senior vocational high schools with an F&B department. In 1995, The Taiwan Ministry of Education made a formal approval for the National Kaohsiung Hospitality College to begin operations. This was the first professional school devoted exclusively to food service and travel industry management in Taiwan. For their admission requirement and qualification for perspective students, the portion of score on skills’ field is most concerned.

Dressing in a nice uniform, expressing elegantly manners in air-conditioned environment with romantic music are the characteristics of the hospitality industry. It sounds like a quite nice white-collar job. The work schedule of this industry is divided by three shifts, and the busiest hours are during each meal times. During the working hours, a worker can always touch many funny people and funny things if he/she is a servant employee. Also, a worker can create no whatever kind of arts he/she wants if he/she a cook. To compare with the other professions, the entry position of this industry is easier than any other industries. That sounds great for youth, especially for those who can not meet the average requirement of schoolwork in their junior high school stages. For the parents, the hospitality industry job is quite a new concept in their minds. Back in the 60s or 70s while those parents were studying, there was no related subject to the hospitality industry. The situation that they face now is rapidly developing this industry. The jobless rate is higher day by day in Taiwan, except for the hospitality field. Being concerned with finding a job easier after graduating from school, most parents agree with their children’s choices, which is often F&B management. Reasonably, parents often change their minds to let their children study in a vocational school.

TEACHERS’ MISSION

When we talk about the teachers’ mission, we would like to discuss the curriculum first. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) state that curriculum is the teacher’s personal practical knowledge. And, from a similar viewpoint, Barrow (1984) explains that the school curriculum is usually the product of various competing individuals or groups who adopt, accept, or change "what they can of the tradition they inherit, in the light of ideas they have acquired" (p. 26). So, teacher’s thought and manners would be has an important effect on student.
According to the founding principles of NKHC, “less theory, more practice; so as to cultivate excellent food service, hotel and travel management personnel.” For facing the social changes, the vocational school teachers should rebuild their curricula. And Tremblay (1990) points out that the classroom environments represent not only a physical and social milieu, but a microcosm of the image teachers have of the real world and its values and ideals.

For selecting a qualified teacher, almost all the vocational schools in Taiwan, must meet not only the degree requirement but the practical experience in industry. Why does the vocational school need such experienced teachers? Like Francophone elites states that the teacher is the soul of the school, the guardian of the cultural heritage, and if students had a patriotic teacher to emulate, they would be overcome with feelings of pride in their cultural heritage (Fortier, 1933; La Survivance, 1936a; Yelle, 1938, p. 232). The situation is the same as vocational school, if students have a teacher who has a positive view of their future professional work; they would be proud of what they have learned and respect themselves.

A document entitled, "Le Crédo de l'institutrice" published in a French newspaper in 1931 insinuated that the soul of teachers who had zealously carried out their nationalist and religious mission would be saved, "Je crois que si j’ai rempli ma mission avec zèle, dévouement et esprit surnaturel "je brilleraï," comme dit Notre Seigneur, dans le firmament et je sauverai mon âme" (La Survivance, 1931, p. 2). The teacher dominates the learning climate and forms a learning environment for students. As I mentioned before, vocational education has always played an extremely important role in the economic development of Taiwan. Vocational education played a vital role not only in helping our nation transition from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy through education and training but also in changing our Chinese traditional thinking from a white-collar job to blue-collar job. Evans & Herr (1978) express that the vocational education field has historically responded to the needs of the national economy by preparing individuals to enter jobs in demand.

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education (NCRVE) has identified eight different models community and technical colleges have used to design and integrate occupational and academic education:
1. Integrating general education requirements.
2. Developing applied academic courses.
3. Incorporating academic skills into occupational programs.
4. Infusing academic models into expanded occupational courses.
5. Developing multidisciplinary courses that combine academic perspectives and occupational concerns.
6. Designing tandem cluster courses in various learning communities.
7. Developing colleges within colleges.

As mentioned above, most of the reports and thoughts are derived from western countries. On the other side, Mainland China (People’s Republic of China), who has the same tribe as Taiwanese, enacted the act which related to vocational education on May 15,1996, by the Nineteenth Session of the Standing Committee of the Eighth National People's Congress, and enforced September 1, 1996. One of Articles of Chapter 1 indicates “Vocational education is an important component of the state's cause of education and an important avenue for promoting economic and social development and labor employment. The state shall develop vocational education, promote reforms of vocational education, improve the quality of vocational education, and establish and perfect a vocational educational system that is consistent with the socialist market economy and with the needs of social advancement.” And, “In implementing vocational education, we must carry out the state guidelines for education, provide the recipients of education with ideological-political education and education in professional ethics, impart professional knowledge, give training in technical skills, provide professional guidance, and improve the attributes of the recipients of education in a well-rounded manner.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the above, I would like to say that vocational education is specific preparation for jobs requiring specialized skills and knowledge. In fact, John Dewey said that vocational education as a life-long process that helps
individuals find direction and meaning in their lives. Vocational education helps young people find direction, purpose, and abilities in their lives. In some ways it is simply about educating the whole person: mind and spirit, head and hand. But now, it is important to build a complete curriculum which relates both knowledge and skills and to carry out the curriculum within the classroom for the vocational education teacher. In addition, as a vocational education teacher, we should strengthen cooperation with the professional world for to supplement and complete our student's professional skills learned at school.

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