

Research on Problems and Responses in the Development from Junior College to University

—Taking Business College of Beijing Union University as an Example

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Abstract—As one kind of Chinese higher vocational education, upgrading from vocational college to university not only meets the needs of students and their parents in terms of education, but also trains a lot of high quality talents with applicable skills for our society. However, due to the unclear orientation of the school's educational goals, the curriculum system and teaching methods are the same as with ordinary undergraduate education. In addition, there exist differences in the make-up of professional knowledge between vocational education and university education, which affects the quality of teaching and training. Therefore, only by clarifying the features of upgrading education, paying attention to practices, and implementing differentiated teaching and module teaching can we give prominence to teaching characteristics and improve training quality.

Keywords— *higher vocational education; goal of cultivation; education; teaching reform*

• I. ABOUT HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

A. Origin

The State Council forwarded the "Education Promotion Plan of Action for the 21st Century" to the Ministry of Education in January of 1999. It proposed, "Gradually building an overpass that allows vocational college graduates who pass the exam to get higher education." In June of the same year the State Council issued the "Decision on Deepening Education Reform and Promoting Education Quality" in which it reiterated that graduates from vocational & technical college (or Vocational College) could pursue further studies at colleges and universities through some kind of selection process. In September of 2002, the State Council issued the "Decision on Promoting Vocational Reform and Development"; it reiterated "properly increasing the percentage of vocational graduates receiving undergraduate education." With these measures as a backdrop, in order to enact the spirit of this document, deepen the reform of higher education, promote the combination of vocational education and college education, encourage the vigorous study habits of higher education and vocational school students, and raise the overall quality of students, the Beijing Municipal Education Commission issued the "Notice on Experimental Work of Selecting Excellent Vocational Graduates to Study at Colleges and Universities". This action marked the beginning of the city Beijing's work in this area. Business School of Beijing Union University, as one of the

pilot units, began to enroll students upgrading from junior college to undergraduate business school in 2003. In the initial stage, because the scale was limited, vocational school graduates transferred directly to third year classes to study the majors corresponding with their vocational school major according to the teaching program for undergraduate students. With the number of students increasing, teaching programs for upgrading students were established with the support of the normal undergraduate program. As a result, students upgrading to the undergraduate program could be taught in a separate class.

B. Status of Development

After several years of development, the scale of upgrading students has gotten larger year by year. Take Beijing as an example, where 15% of outstanding students among 21725 vocational students can be recommended to take the entrance examination for upgrading from junior college to university, of whom one-third students (around 1100) can enter undergraduate universities. By 2009, the acceptance rates increased three percentage points (15% of outstanding students can take the exam, among whom half of the students can enter undergraduate universities, with the total number of accepted students reaching 1800.) The reasons for the gradual development of upgrading education are as the follows: To begin with, students who upgrade and then graduate to a large extent satisfy the needs of social and economic development; second, as a new type of higher education, it provides the basic platform and opportunity to connect vocational education and college education, which greatly promotes the development of higher vocational education; third, it meets the needs of students and the parents of students who are yearning to continue to deepen their studies; fourth, it can ease employment pressure to some extent. To take Business School of Beijing Union University as an example, it enrolled 6 vocational school students upgrading to undergraduate students in 2003, which amounted to more than 1/3 of the total upgrading student enrollment in 2010.

II. SEVERAL PROMINENT ISSUES IN UPGRADING EDUCATION

A. Unclear Training Goals

The concept of Talent Cultivation refers to "setting out guidelines according to the goals of education and some certain constraints, expected results of educational activities, and the expected status of students' development. It is the starting

point and destination of all educational activities and the basis for the educational practice and teaching evaluation. The initial goal of “upgrading from junior college to university” is to establish an “overpass” for talented students, motivate active learning, and improve students’ overall quality. As we have said, upgrading education has been reliant on ordinary college education; in the long term the goal of talent and personnel training is same as that of undergraduate college education, for instance, training higher professional personnel with wide and deep theoretical knowledge, solid technical skills and abilities in scientific research and technological development. On the other hand, currently it is generally believed that higher vocational education in our country belongs to the junior college level, which aims to personnel talented in applied technical fields i.e. to train personnel with applicable talent in technology to work at the front line of production, construction, and service sectors. When upgrading students enter university, they are trained as common college students to meet the knowledge, ability and qualification requirements, which ignore or give up the fundamental nature of common vocational education, i.e. oriented by employment and training advanced technical personnel, which is reflected in the following areas: an emphasis on profession and theory, while ignoring foundation and practice. Thirdly, with economic and technological development as well as improvements in industry, more and more high-level technical talents are needed by society. Meanwhile with the popularization of higher education, more and more local institutions of higher education declare their goals to be developing into applied universities and training personnel with applicable skills. This leads to the confusion of training goals, because both college education and upgrading education have the same goals. Fourth, a survey indicated that, facing job market pressures, vocational colleges, in order to satisfy the demands for higher education of students and their families take the rate of college enrollment as an important index for evaluating teaching quality, assessment, evaluation and incentives for students’ studies. In addition, the content and standards of the entrance examination tends to be more academic, which causes discrepancies in the training goals for upgrading students, and weakens graduates’ vocational abilities.

B. . The Difference in Students’ Education Background leads to Great Differences in Professional Qualification

Because the credit system in higher vocational education in our country varies from college to college, there is a lot of flexibility on major and curriculum design, there are no agreed standards and specifications, which objectively results in inconsistencies in connecting vocational education and college education. According to the policy of registration, students can choose different majors or relative majors when they enter college, which results in great difference between professional background and knowledge, making it difficult to combine the curriculum of vocational education and college education together. Take the program of Marketing and Finance in Business School of Beijing Union University as an example; we can see the following problems based on analysis of 2010 entering students’ majors, original schools, and the different teaching plans.

- Big differences in professional backgrounds

The business school enrolled 54 students majoring in marketing from 9 vocational colleges, 62.96% students studied marketing in their original colleges, 24.07% students majored in logistics, 14.81% students majored in automobile technology service and marketing, community management and service, pharmaceutical management and so on. As for Finance Program, 31 upgrading students were enrolled in 2010, 76.34% students chose Finance and Investment, 12.21% students chose to study Finance and Insurance, 6.11% students chose to study Financial Management, with the rest of the students studying Investment and Investment and Asset Analysis and Management.

- Big gaps exists among major coursework

Based on the analysis of teaching program in different schools, we discovered that each school had different basic required courses for majors. Even for a major like marketing, there are no agreed standards in terms of teaching content, course titles, academic hours and credits, and as a result, it is very hard to connect vocational curriculum and college curriculum.

C. Teaching Methods are Unable to Cultivate Students’ Professional Abilities

Current teaching in colleges mostly adopts traditional teaching methods, which are teacher-centered, and focuses on systematic knowledge. Because of the convergence of training goals between upgrading education and undergraduate education, teaching, therefore, should take into consideration students’ future choices of taking examinations for postgraduate study and going abroad for further study. Especially for local universities, a team of faculty will be responsible for designing and establishing majors, constructing courses, teaching material, etc. In addition they teach not only undergraduates, but also upgrading students. Therefore, a teacher usually teaches the same course to both upgrading students and undergraduate students and supervises them as they write their dissertations. As a result, it is difficult to reconcile and give prominence to the features of syllabus design, teaching contents, and setting goals for teaching. Meanwhile, these closed teaching methods, lacking a practical foundation outside of the classroom, are unable to train students upgrading from vocational college to undergraduate college in practical skills. Thus, it is difficult for students’ vocational skills and comprehensive quality to receive formal training and practice.

D. Strong Rigid Teaching Administration System is too Strong

Current training follows a unified training plan and the unified goal of talents training with a “Marching” school year system, in particular large scale “Mass Production” training methods and the unified graduation dissertation have a lot of influence, which make it difficult to adapt to the characteristics of students and meet the needs of students’ vocational development.

E. The Difficulty of Centralized Practice for Students

Usually most companies and institutions cannot receive a large amount of students for internships because of their limited size. Some companies or institutions receive student interns, but it is difficult to arrange for them to work in some

key positions, and students are only involved in work related to general affairs. As a result, the internships are either difficult to implement or the effect of their implementation is not obvious. It is really hard to put training into practice for students' practical abilities and professional qualities.

III. SOME SUGGESTIONS ON TEACHING REFORM

A. Clarify the Goals of Talent Training, Making the Training Plan Targeted for Employment

We should review the cultivation goal of upgrading students with a consideration of characteristics of vocational education. As I have said, upgrading students who receive undergraduate education must meet the basic requirements of undergraduate education while at the same time main training their professional characteristics as well. The training goal should be to meet and suit the high demand and requirements for the scientific, technological, and economic development of our country. Vocational education should focus on cultivating the students' "occupation skills, employment abilities and ethics, and satisfy the economic and social needs for high-quality workers and skilled talents required by "National education reform and development of long-term planning programs". To be specific, the higher vocational education of training talents should have the abilities in three areas: to begin with, they should be practical talents with theoretical knowledge and necessary practical skills. Theoretical knowledge refers to the related theory and knowledge corresponding to a position in an industry, which should include the basic knowledge and professional knowledge and knowledge of economic law and so on. The requirements for personnel or receiving higher education should not only be to have actual practical professional abilities, but also to have comprehensive abilities in entrepreneurship and innovation. The practical abilities that vocational talent or personnel possess must be based on some theories and knowledge, which should be characterized by integration and comprehensiveness. Second, they should work on the front line of production, construction, management and service sectors. Third, they should be trained for the local economic construction and social development, adapting to the actual needs of the job market.

Professor Gao Lin in Beijing Union University put forward six kinds of qualified personnel cultivated by undergraduate education, namely personnel with talents applicable to scientific research, engineering design, applied technology, as well as personnel talented in versatile and practical abilities, and personnel talented in services and professional industries. He argues that the latter four kinds of talents are the goal of higher applied education. He took Beijing Union University as an example, and compared ordinary undergraduate education, technical applied education and higher vocational education, and found that technical applied education should also target training highly talented personnel with necessary theoretical knowledge and practical abilities who can work in the front line of production, construction, and management and service sectors. One of the distinctive features of this kind of talented personnel is that they directly provide services to production and real-life work. Meanwhile, since they are undergraduates, they boast of wider and deeper theoretical knowledge than

graduates from ordinary vocational education and possess the abilities in research, design, organization, management and innovation.

B. Analyzing the Characteristics of the Students and Designing Curriculum System Based on the Demands of Students' Diversified Development

We should collect and analyze the characteristics of students, focusing on training goals, teaching methods, curriculum system, teaching contents, target models, and course system, and study students' knowledge, ability, quality, background, and students' future career development needs, adjusting the traditional curriculum system on the basis of developing a knowledge structure targeted for employment, training practical abilities, innovation, and adapting to the future jobs. For example, we can adopt a "1+0.5+0.5" curriculum system (one year for theoretical knowledge, half a year in a school lab, or at a school-sponsored or enterprise-sponsored internship, and for the last half-year, students can choose one real topic at a business, carry out a survey, and complete an internship report, which can replace the graduation dissertation)

C. Strengthen the Construction of Practical Foundations; Implement Decentralized Internships under the Guidance of an Academic Advisor with Prominent Focus on Career Development

Students' practical abilities, especially the abilities of solving practical problems cannot be easily learnt by teaching and simulation experiments, because students will face more complicated problems when they are in real work situations. Thus, it is best to ask students to learn through outside practice by which students can develop strong professional abilities. However, there are many problems we will face, as the establishment and design of internships as a foundation relies on the efforts of program leaders and the support of school leaders. Only by creating a win-win situation for the school and enterprises can the internship program outside of school experience sustainable development. Internships in economics and management should be encouraged to be undertaken in a decentralized manner, and a "Double Tutorial System" should be established between teacher and staff in enterprises. Under personalized guidance, supervision, and inspection, the goal of training students' in practical abilities can be achieved.

D. Implementing Credit System and Module Teaching to Solve the Problem of Differentiated Training for Students

Differences in students' professional qualities call to attention severe challenges to traditional teaching models. In order to solve this problem, it is necessary to carry out different training and administration methods. The credit system, modular and hierarchical teaching are the key to solving the problem, meanwhile tests should be taken in English, computer, and other skill-set courses prior to students beginning coursework. Through testing, differentiated teaching can be carried out based on the results of students' test scores. For example, students who passed College English Test Band 4 can participate in the courses of College English Band 6. Professional foundation courses also can be differentiated according to their original majors, grading into different levels of teaching, for example, microeconomics, which will be

divided into Elementary Microeconomics and Intermediate microeconomics. As for the professional courses, teaching modules should be selected and constructed in accordance with students' future professional development needs. Students from other majors are required to attend elementary Microeconomics, and the students majoring in Economics can attend Intermediate Microeconomics. Students who want to have further study can choose a module for postgraduate studies to strengthen English and Higher Mathematics; students who want to find jobs can choose an employment module according to their own interests and prospects for career development; Students who want to study abroad can improve their English and learn about British and American cultures from courses that will help them adapt to foreign courses easily. This kind of curriculum system not only meets the personalized needs of students but also solves the problem of uneven professional qualities of students.

*E. Combining Rigidity with Flexibility of Education
Administration to Ensure Personalized Training for Students*

The new concept of vocational education is bound to bring about reforms in training goals, teaching programs, curriculum systems, and teaching methods, which put forth a big challenge to education administration. Therefore, we must change the method of traditional education administration and combine rigidity with elasticity based on the goal of reaching basic standards. For example, teaching can be conducted in several distinct phases. In addition, curriculum evaluation can adopt a test of comprehensive abilities and practical abilities (say presentation, speech, case analysis, course project, research report, etc.). Combining testing for vocational qualification certificates with professional learning, as well as combining participation in high-level competitions with professional training can effectively improve students' vocational abilities.

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