

# How to Connect General Education to Core Qualities of Students' Development

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**Abstract**—In China, general education started in the late 1990's. After nearly twenty years of development, many colleges and universities in our country have carried out general education and diversified its development. But the effect of general education was not guaranteed in that there was a deviation in the implementation of general education because China's regular institutions of higher learning misunderstood the connotation of general education. Last year, the proposal of Core Qualities of Students' Development pointed out the direction for general education. Thus how to connect general education to core qualities of students' development has become an important issue that needs an urgent study. The author makes a rough discussion of the subject and hopes it could induce some ideas more valuable. Firstly, the author gives the contents and main points of Core Qualities of Chinese Students' Development; then, the author points out misunderstandings in the process of general education in regular institutions of higher learning, and puts forward the key moves for the reform of general education led by “six core qualities”.

**Index Terms**—[微软用户1] Regular institutions of higher learning; General education; Core qualities of students' development

## I. INTRODUCTION

Educators have their own understandings of general education due to a lack of authorial definition of it. In recent years, to implement the reform of talents training model, key universities have put more emphasis on general education and innovated bravely according to the actual situation of each university, forming different general education models. Therefore, general education in China's key universities have entered a diversified development stage; whereas general education in regular institutions of higher learning is still limited to simply elective courses. Before sorting out the connotation of general education in China, blindly implementing general education is doomed to face with ideological errors. Therefore, general education of regular institutions of higher learning is in an

urgent need of reform. At present, based on the proposal of Core Qualities of Chinese Students' Development, how to connect general education to core qualities of students' development in regular institutions of higher learning requires college educators to think and discuss carefully. The ultimate goal is to comprehensively improve their understanding of the core qualities of students' development and to sort out the connotation of general education, thus allowing general education to play an important role in improving the core qualities of college students and the quality of higher education

## II. CORE QUALITIES OF CHINESE STUDENTS' DEVELOPMENT

The report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly pointed out: “We should set strengthening moral education and cultivating people as the fundamental task of education so as to foster socialist constructors and successors of all-round development.” This is a clear requirement for the educators from an overall and strategic angle. In 2014, the Ministry of Education issued on deepening the curriculum reform to implement the fundamental task of strengthening moral education and cultivating people, in which the concept “core qualities system” was first proposed. After that, the Ministry of Education commissioned the Beijing Normal University to unite nearly 100 experts from colleges and universities in China to set up a study group on “core qualities of Chinese students' development”, which lasted nearly three years. In September, 2016, research results were officially released. The content and points of “Core Qualities of Chinese Students' Development” must be familiarized with and understood by every educator and educated person.

### A. The content of Core Qualities of Chinese Students' Development

Having “to cultivate people of all-round development” as the core, “Core Qualities of Chinese Students' Development” are divided into three aspects: cultural foundation, independent development and social participation; they are comprehensively shown as six core

qualities: “humanistic background, scientific spirit, knowing how to learn, healthy life, accountability and the practice of innovation”; they are specifically refined to eighteen basic points: “humanistic accumulation, humanistic feelings, aesthetic taste, rational thinking, critical questioning, courage to explore, will to learn, diligent reflection, information awareness, cherishing life, integrity of personality, self-management, social responsibility, national identity, international understanding, labor awareness, problem solving, technology use”.

“Six core qualities” refer to the qualities students should have: basic ability, emotional attitude and value orientation in learning, understanding and applying scientific knowledge and skills; values and standards, ways of thinking and behaviors in learning, understanding and applying scientific knowledge and skills; comprehensive performance in the formation of learning awareness, choosing learning methods, evaluation and control of learning process; comprehensive performance in understanding themselves, physical and mental development, planning life and other aspects; emotional attitude, value orientation and behaviors in dealing social, national, international and other aspects of relationships; ability to practice, innovation awareness and behaviors formed in daily activities, problem solving, adaptation to challenges.

“Eighteen basic points” refer to requiring students to be equipped with basic knowledge and achievements in both ancient and modern days, in both domestic and foreign fields; to be people-oriented, to respect and maintain people's dignity and value, to be concerned about the survival, development and happiness of people; to accumulate artistic knowledge, skills and methods; to understand and respect the diversity of arts and culture, to have awareness and basic ability of discovering, perceiving, appreciating and evaluating beauty and to have healthy aesthetic value orientation, to have interest in and awareness of artistic expression and creation, to expand and sublimate beauty in life; to respect the truth, understand and master basic principles and methods of science; to respect facts and evidence, have a sense of evidence and rigorous sense of knowledge; to have clear logic and can use scientific thinking to understand things, solve problems and guide behavior; to have awareness of questioning; to be able to think independently, judge independently; to think carefully, analyze problems from multi angles dialectically, make choices and decisions; to have curiosity and imagination; to be fearless of difficulties, to explore with a spirit of perseverance; to be able to try bravely and seek actively effective solutions to problems and so on; to correctly recognize and understand the value of learning, having a positive attitude towards and a strong interest in learning; to develop good learning habits and master learning methods suitable for themselves; to self-study and have lifelong learning awareness and ability; to have awareness and habit of looking at their own learning status and to be good at reviewing and improving

themselves; to choose and adjust learning strategies and methods according to different situations and their own reality; to be able to consciously and effectively obtain, evaluate, identify and use information; to have a digital viability, take the initiative to adapt to social information development trends such as “Internet”; to have network ethics and information security awareness; to correctly understand the meaning of life and the value of life; to have a sense of safety and self-protection; to master their own sports methods and skills to develop healthy and civilized behavioral habits and lifestyles; to have positive psychological qualities, to become self-confident, self-loving, resilient and optimistic; to be able to restrain, regulate and manage their own emotions, have the ability to rebound from frustration; to correctly understand and evaluate themselves; to choose an appropriate direction of development according to their own personality and potential; to rationally distribute and use time and energy; to have sustained actions to reach their goals; to have self-esteem, self-discipline, become civilized and courteous, honest and friendly, tolerant with others; to show filial piety to their relatives and elders and be grateful; to be enthusiastic about public service and volunteer service, be dedicated to their jobs, have team spirit and mutual-help spirit; to be able to take the initiative, perform their duty and be responsible for themselves and others; to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, have awareness of rules and rule of law, and actively fulfill the obligations of citizens, rationally exercise civil rights; to advocate freedom and equality, be able to safeguard social fairness and justice; to love and respect nature, have ideas and actions of green lifestyle and sustainable development; to have national consciousness, understand the history of national conditions, be proud of national identity, to consciously defend national sovereignty, dignity and interests; to have self-confidence in culture, respect the outstanding achievements of Chinese civilization, be able to promote the outstanding traditional Chinese culture and socialist advanced culture; to understand the history and glorious tradition of the Communist Party of China, have consciousness and actions of loving the party and supporting the party; to understand, accept and consciously practice the socialist core values, share the common ideals of socialism with Chinese characteristics, have faith in and actions of unremitting struggle for the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation; to have a global awareness and open mind, to understand the process of human civilization and world development trends; to respect the diversity and difference of the world's multiculturalism, and actively participate in cross-cultural exchanges; to be concerned about the global challenges facing mankind, understand the connotation and value of human fate community; to respect labor, to have a positive attitude and good labor habits; to have hands-on ability to master a certain degree of labor skills; have awareness of improving and innovating ways of labor to raise the efficiency of labor during active participation in the housework, production labor, public welfare activities and

social practice; to have awareness and actions to create a successful life by honest and legitimate work; to be good at discovering and asking questions, to have interest in and enthusiasm about solving problems; to choose or develop a reasonable solution according to specific circumstances and conditions; to have the ability to act in complex environments; to understand the organic connection between technology and human civilization, to have the interest and willingness to learn and master the technology; to have engineering thinking and can transform ideas and programs into tangible objects, or to improve and optimize existing items.

### *B. Significance of releasing the Core Qualities of Students' Development*

Since the beginning of the 21st century, education around the world has been focused on the cultivation of core qualities of people, and on thinking about how to cultivate future citizens so that they can better adapt to future work and life. Education of core qualities has attracted worldwide attention, and even become a basis on which many countries or regions develop their education policy and carry out educational reform. China's proposal of the "Core Qualities of Chinese Students' Development" is not only implementing the fundamental requirement of "strengthening moral education and cultivating people" from the central committee of CPC, but also the only way for China's education to be in line with the international education.

"Core Qualities Of Chinese Students' Development" mainly follow the three principles of science, times and nationalities, firmly stick to the fundamental requirements of strengthening moral education and cultivating people; adhere to putting people foremost, following the law of students' physical and mental development and the discipline of education; fully reflect the new requirements of personnel training in the new era of economic and social development; fully embody the advanced educational ideas and educational philosophy. They enable students to have the necessary qualities and key competencies to adapt to lifelong development and social development. They are the comprehensive performance of students' knowledge, skills, emotions, attitudes, values and other aspects; they are indispensable common qualities each student needs to live a successful life, and to adapt to personal lifelong development and social development

"Eighteen basic points" explain the "six core qualities" from a more subtle perspective, many of which point to the pain points of current higher learning. For example, one of the points "cherishing life, sound personality, and self-management" is implying that current students have certain problems in psychological management and self-control ability. Therefore, this point requires students to understand the meaning of life and the value of life, to have a positive psychological quality, to possess self-confidence, self-love, resilience and optimism; to have self-control and to regulate and manage their own emotions, and to have ability to rebound from setbacks.

With the release of the "Core Qualities of Chinese Students' Development", basic education reform oriented to core competencies has been rapidly launched. Beginning in September, 2017, primary and secondary schools in nationwide will carry out a series of major historic teaching reforms in the new semester. China's basic education will gradually shift from the examination-oriented education to the core competency education. This will be a major change in educational philosophy, which will be in line with the fundamental requirements of China's "education oriented to modernization, facing the world and facing the future", and will point out the direction for deepening education reform.

Taken into account the basic education of our country has changed to the core qualities education, and the core qualities of human needs to be developed and improved throughout our life, so in higher education, vigorously developing the core qualities of students should be brought on the agenda as soon as possible. It should be the primary task for both teachers and students to be clear of the content of "six core qualities" and "eighteen basic points". The significance of this is to teach teachers how to improve their professional development by improving their core qualities, updating their educational ideas, changing the existing "subject-based" and "knowledge-based" phenomena, and at the same time, to help students sort out their future directions of development, encourage students to continue to work towards their established goals. This will undoubtedly play a significant role in improving the quality of education in regular institutions of higher learning.

## III. GENERAL EDUCATION

### *A. Various expressions of general education*

Looking at domestic and foreign literature, we can see although general education has different forms of expression, their goals are becoming more and more consistent.

General education can be seen as a concept different from professional education, but higher than basic education in primary and secondary school. It is a kind of ordinary education, and is mainly to effectively popularize common education to all college students. Its main purpose is to implement a full range of education to the educated, so that students could reach a certain degree of attainments in personality, knowledge, emotion, rationality and characterization, and full space for free development is given to students. At present, general education has become an internationally recognized educational model and method. Since the 20th century, universities have launched general education in the United States, Germany, Britain, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and other advanced countries and regions. Although different people still have different views on general education, setting of general education curriculum, and its connotation and denotation, everyone's opinion of its ultimate goal is the same. That is, to cultivate open and

integrated thinking through the acquisition of different disciplines of knowledge, to be able to understand the depth and intensity of human thoughts from an open and interdisciplinary vision, so as to achieve communication between different cultures and disciplines. This is also the basic meaning of the word “general” in this name.

General education is a symbol of the pursuit of perfect education at university. It is not only to develop the spirit of humanism, more importantly, it is also to cultivate students' understanding of and attitude to the new society. To shape the path for their future development, it is not only necessary to attach importance to a certain degree of scientific development, to emphasize the integration of different areas of expertise, to train students' thinking and keen insight, but also necessary to pay attention to the content of humanity, to students' EQ, character and values. Obviously, general education like this will not only bring students' knowledge growth of a certain aspect, but also enable them to get spiritual inspiration, to receive mental training and feel the pleasure in it, to improve their own ability and quality, to reflect on life and society, to cultivate their independent consciousness and critical spirit, and ultimately to form a sound personality, to grow into a physically strong, mentally sound, knowledgeable and comprehensive developing person, that is a complete person. Therefore, general education should be referred to as “complete person” education.

#### *B. Misunderstandings of general education*

Over the past decade, in order to promote the implementation of comprehensive quality education, domestic colleges and universities have introduced general education one after another. However, due to the lack of knowledge and guidance of an authorial definition of general education, there are many ideological errors in the implementation process of regular colleges and universities. They were not clear of the training objectives and ideas of general education, and had a lot of fuzzy and contradictory understandings of the status of general education. At present, there is a very common problem of paying too many emphases on professional education and few on general education. And they even regard this single form of opening some non-professional education elective classes to the whole school students, as all of general education. Obviously, the effect cannot be guaranteed of such general education.

Through in-depth analysis of the misunderstandings of general education, it is not difficult to find the root causes of these errors are as follows: first of all, school education managers mistakenly believe that general education is to open as many elective courses suitable for the whole school students as possible, and define in general all the courses set up beside required courses on the syllabus as general education courses. They did not conduct in-depth study of the curriculum setting under general education system, but simply collect courses from the whole school teachers. It is generally possible to be passed as long as a teacher applies for it--without prioritization, the minimum

level of requirements, strict argument or review procedures, or structural, holistic combing and integration, not to mention to design creative curriculum from reality. This has led to a wide variety of general education courses, among which most are knowledge inculcating courses. However, there are few curriculums with connotations and can stimulate students' critical thinking and innovation ability. The random buffet-style combination of students' general courses is tasteless although the amount is huge. This has led to students only choosing easier-to-get-credit courses and neglecting other reasons for the selection totally. It is clear that general education curriculum has become synonymous with student credits. Many colleges and universities take general education as ornaments or attachments in college education. It is ubiquitous that general education is a supplement to professional education in regular institutions of higher learning.

Second, the setting of general education curriculums' content is largely at the discretion of teachers. It is not treated as seriously and rigorously as it is for specialized courses. There is little depth of teaching content, and it is okay as long as the course can still expand a little knowledge to students. Usually they are presented in the form of “general introduction” to students. There is no teaching team for general education courses so that teachers are in a state of solo, which leads to the poor stability of curriculum, let alone curriculum construction. As for curriculum evaluation, there is no such entire process of monitoring system as that of monitoring professional courses, including opening the course, giving the course, assessing the course and other aspects of teaching throughout the process, so some teachers haven't devoted enough energy to general courses or treated them with serious enough attitude, but merely take them as a tool for earning workload. The existence of these questions will obviously turn into a result that teaching quality and effectiveness are difficult to be guaranteed. If we further study its root causes, it can be attributed to the school teaching managers implementing the so-called general education in a simple and extensive management model.

#### IV. BE CLEAR OF THE KEY TO THE REFORM OF GENERAL EDUCATION

China's education points to core qualities, “knowledge-core era” will really move towards the “quality-core era”. The task of universities is no longer blindly inculcating knowledge, but to provide core competencies for the future development of students. In this context, universities' general education will play an irreplaceable role in higher education. Based on the current problems of general education, regular institutions of higher learning must carry out comprehensive reform of general education. As any reform will not be smooth sailing, general education reform will also encounter all kinds of difficulties. The most critical first step is to get real ideological attention of the school leaders in regular institutions of higher learning on the road of general education reform, to change their

existing ideas of general education as soon as possible, and to sort out the connotation of general education. General education for the purpose of enhancing the core qualities development of students should be placed on the same important position with professional education. Each university should form their own reform idea gradually, and carry out to teachers and students in the institution. In view of the imperative reform of general education, a few measures will be put forward on how to reform in this article.

#### *A. To be clear of the guiding ideology of general education reform*

We should adhere to “cultivating people of comprehensive development” as the core, stick to the principle of coordinated development of “six core qualities”, take “eighteen basic points” requirements as the standard, rely on the advantages of each school, and combine the characteristics of physical and mental development of students with different requirements of schools' talents training objectives, comb and integrate the existing general education curriculum comprehensively and systematically, and to build a reasonable structured general education curriculum system suitable for the development of students' core qualities. This must become the guideline for general education reform in regular institutions of higher learning.

#### *B. Stick to unified understanding under guiding ideology*

In addition to making clear of guiding ideology, the key to the reform of general education in regular institutions of higher learning still need a unified understanding of the whole institution, breaking the old educational barriers, and sorting out new educational philosophy. First of all, school administrators should raise their awareness and place emphasis on general education reform, and do their publicizing work well. Second, teaching managers should issue “six core qualities” content and “eighteen basic points” requirements to each teaching department, requiring all teachers to seriously study and discuss them. The guiding ideology of the general education reform should also be clearly pointed out and its importance clarified, so that we really understand the connotation of general education, so as to comprehensively improve our awareness and unity of understanding. Then, the whole school students ought to be asked to understand the “six core qualities” content and “eighteen basic points” requirements, the guiding ideology of general education reform, and to clarify its importance to personal development. In the end, we must collectively recognize that the “six core qualities” keeps “cultivating comprehensive development of people” as the central task, and the general education which is led by “six core qualities” is focused on the cultivation of personality and taking personality shaping as the primary goal of general education. Admittedly, the ultimate goal of education is to guide people to the reality, goodness, and beauty, which is essentially the pursuit of ideally sound personality. From

this level, the essence of education is also the process of people's continuous pursuit of ideal integrated personality. General education must meet the requirements of the nature of education. China puts forward to strengthen the education of students' core competencies, which is the education to make students to be reality, goodness and beauty. This undoubtedly is a great improvement in China's educational goal, but also a strategic adjustment to the entire education industry. Both basic and higher education must implement the country's strategic requirements. It must be reversed that paying too much attention on professional education and few on general education in the traditional higher education.

#### *C. Measure discussion after unified understanding*

First, universities should set up research teams for general education. Some colleges and universities have set up supervisory teams for the quality of teaching in specialized education. Team members are usually composed of retired senior teachers and in-service teachers who have certain achievements in teaching. Thus it is also of vital importance to set up a similar research team for general education. For universities with research institutions of higher education, the research team can be mainly composed of the staff of the Institute, plus some teachers selected from the university who are interested in general education or have a certain basis of the study. As for schools without a higher education research institute, this team can be led by senior teachers interested in general education and are good at studying higher education. The rest team members are the same as mentioned above. The work of the general education research team (hereinafter referred to as the research team) should be all-round: first, to concisely interpret the “six core qualities” and its “eighteen basic points”, and to help teachers and students to correctly master and understand the connotation of general education as soon as possible. Second, in the setting of curriculum, to careful study the existing general education curriculums, learn experience from countries and regions with relatively mature education, but not blindly copy their curriculum system. General education abroad focuses on a wider, deeper education of the basic knowledge of humanities, society and nature, the spread of human cultural heritage and its enlightenment to students' personality. It is understandable that their curriculum system is rich and perfect, while our regular institutions of higher learning should design and set up curriculums creatively according to our own characteristics and reality, and gradually improve our institution's general education curriculum system. In this regard, the work of the research team is quite arduous. It should carry all the research and management work of the university's general education. Third, the research team should check the design of the courses' content, make sure that teaching content and teaching objectives of each general course are understood properly, then guide accordingly, and never allow teachers to set up whatever curriculums at their will. Fourth, the teaching effectiveness of each general course should be

evaluated. The research team can obtain curriculum feedback and evaluation of the course by talking to students or attending classes randomly. The results of the evaluation should be given to the teacher in a timely manner. Fifth, it is important to collect students' feedback about the general education curriculum, so that we can adjust and improve it in time. Sixth, the research team should be responsible for exchanging work experience with other sister universities and implement it.

Second, each school should set up a general education supervision team (hereinafter referred to as the school-level supervision team). This team can be organized by student union, to collect students enthusiastic about general education courses from the whole school. It is made up by students from all departments and majors, even including master and Ph.D. students. Of course, the number of the team cannot be too much nor too few. 30 to 50 people, the size of a natural class is recommended. Work of school-level supervision team can be: first, to communicate directly with the research team, and offer comments on and suggestions to general curriculum to give feedback on the information of students' needs. Second, to promote all students' enthusiasm about learning general education. School-level supervision team can organize a learning club of a certain learning course, to carry out different forms of learning and activities, which can not only stimulate students' interest in learning, but also to exercise multidimensional ability of students. Third, the school-level supervision group members can return to their respective faculties and serve as leaders to jointly organize second-level study groups with the members of the student union. Second-level school group can organize students of its department, establish a number of small communities to take general courses. Small community activities can be in different forms. Fourth, school-level supervision team can organize learning activities among second-level supervision groups such as debate contest, knowledge contest, paper defense and so on. Fifth, in general courses, teachers can first put forward curriculum objectives and requirements, list bibliography, and then ask the supervision team members to learn. During the classes students can lecture in groups and teachers can listen to them and offer their guidance. It is undeniable that the energy of students is huge, if you can mobilize the enthusiasm of students to learn and make each student actively participate in the learning activities of general courses, then our general education will definitely achieve unexpected results, and also play its unusual role in improving the quality of higher education. In short, to make the general education reform connect very well with the education of students' core qualities development, the work of research team and supervision team will play an irreplaceable role. Especially for the supervision team which is made up by students, if they can really play a leading role in the study of each general course, it will definitely be an invisible, great help for the improvement of students' core competencies. Of course, the establishment and organization of the research team and

supervision team, and how their work is going to be carried out remain to be further studied.

Third, to put general education management in the first place, school education managers must be clear that the quality of general education determines the quality of the higher education. Moreover, high-quality general education courses are the key to the success of general education. For the design and setting of general education courses, it is necessary to change the current chaotic and disorganized practices, and focus on the development of a limited number of "core courses". Because the number of teachers and their teaching ability of each school are limited, it is quite difficult to establish a high-quality, better general education curriculum system from the current point of view. Therefore, different schools should set several targeted types of "core curriculums" carefully according to their situation. Then, with the guidance of the research team, teachers can carry out different forms of teaching activities. The supervision team could help students to study different courses happily by using different learning methods. The school education managers could accumulate experience of all aspects through setting up several types of "core curriculums", then they could extend the general curriculums gradually to a number of areas.

Fourth, research teams among regular institutions of higher learning could form a general education model of resource sharing through exchange of work and consultation. As for how it should be implemented specifically, it is worth further study. In addition, regular institutions of higher learning can also share the teaching resources of key universities, that is, to hire key university teachers to open general education courses for students, or to allow students from regular institutions of higher learning to take elective general education courses at key universities in the same city. In short, the problem of sharing general education resources needs education managers of regular institutions of higher learning to study carefully and is worth exploring and developing.

Five, you can choose Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) as general education curriculums in the following two forms. One form is for students to choose MOOC from the platform to learn by themselves according to their own ideas. After completing the self-study, students will take an exam, and the results will be certified by the course provider. After obtaining a certificate of eligibility, the student's school must acknowledge appropriate credits. Another form is for students to choose MOOC under the guidance of instructors at their university, and in learning process the instructors need to follow up guidance from time to time. Apparently, they can leave homework for students based on their progress of the course such as asking students questions. There are various ways to answer the questions. They can be answered individually by students in the form of papers, or presentation after group-discussion. Each student must elaborate their point of view during the group discussion. Group students can supervise and support each

other. In this process each student can not only fully grasp the knowledge of the course, but also can really improve their learning ability. Through the introduction of MOOC into higher education, students can control their pace of learning independently, while instructors can save their lecture time to share ideas with students and have Q & A, which will get better teaching effectiveness.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In this paper the author mainly discusses how general education could connect to the development of students' core qualities. Firstly, the author gives the contents and main points of "the core qualities of students' development" and the meaning and significance of the proposal of "the core qualities of Chinese students' development"; And then the author points out the misunderstandings in the process of general education in colleges and universities; most importantly, the author puts forward a series of initiatives for the reform of general education led by "six core competencies". The key is to change the idea of the education, to require all educators to understand the connotation of general education, put general education whose purpose is to enhancing the core qualities of students on the same important position with the professional education, to unify understanding and work together to form a reform idea suitable for the development of general education in their own institution. Finally, specific reform measures are discussed, along with the working scopes of research team and supervision team. The author thinks to connect the reform of general

education to the development of university students' core qualities better, the work of research team and supervision team will play an irreplaceable role. While further study is required on the setting and organizing of the two teams and how they could better work.

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