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Confronting Challenges to the Liberal Arts Curriculum: Perspectives of Developing and Transitional Countries. Patti McGill Peterson (Ed). London and New York: Routledge, 2012. 248 pp. \$47.95. ISBN: 9780415506069.

Contemporary international higher education scholarship tends to focus on the global financial crisis, on massification, privatization, cross-border education, university ranking, and student mobility. However, few studies deal with the development of liberal arts programs around the world and they are often related to Western systems of higher education or that of the US, where liberal arts education has long been seen as a fundamental issue. Comparative studies, however, could help scholars to become aware of critical trends and reforms, also the impact they might have on a global society.

This important book provides the academic community with a detailed analysis of the history, context, challenges, and the potential for success of liberal

arts education in developing and transitional countries. It is the first book I have read that gives an overview of the development of liberal arts education in the international context of developing and transitional countries. There are ten chapters in the book and the contributing authors are experienced educators, researchers, and practitioners in higher education. The introductory chapter offers a succinct explanation of the origin and structure of the book and a brief treatment of the development of liberal arts education in an historical and global context. In a globally competitive society, academic communities are challenged to rethink the role of higher education in cultivating responsible, critical, creative and innovative citizens. Chapters two to nine focus on China, India, Mexico, Pakistan, Poland, Russia, South Africa, and Turkey. Each chapter provides an overview of the context of higher education (some also include secondary education), the policy on higher education development, and the current thinking on liberal arts education. Transformations of liberal arts education in terms of curricular reform and related challenges are also discussed, including a few successful examples of liberal arts education. The concluding chapter deals with the crucial role of liberal arts education in undergraduate education in developed and developing countries, also the problems arising in the implementation of liberal arts education and prospects for the future.

This book explains the reemergence of liberal arts education as a result of the great need to educate well-rounded citizens. It notes that the revival of interest in liberal arts education in developing and transitional countries has demonstrated that government and universities have begun to realize that the current curricula, professional training, and narrowly specialized education fail to help students to be fully competent in a globalized economy. Much of contemporary education lacks the integration that critical thinking and creativity provide, along with the broadened intellectual horizon that innovative thinking produces. Authorities and educators are learning that the liberal arts lead not only to broad general knowledge but also to critical skills and innovative thinking. A liberal arts education is perceived as essential to the preparation for a globalized world.

This book also discusses several issues common to developing and transitional countries in implementing liberal arts education: the lack of understanding of liberal arts education, inadequate policies of support, the fact that sciences and technology and other professional programs dominate academic development, and the reluctance of faculty members to make a change in the rote teaching methods and transmission pedagogy that they are accustomed to. Because the developing and transitional countries in this study have moved towards a capitalist market economy in the last few decades, their societies and higher educational systems have experienced rapid change and reform. Much evidence suggests that specialized or professional education programs have not succeeded

in satisfying the demands of economic development in a global context, University graduates often lack leadership ability, creativity, critical and innovative thinking skills, and the capacity for moral reasoning.

Faculty members play a crucial role in the process of implementing liberal arts education programs. It is somewhat surprising that many of the authors included in this volume do not emphasize the special role of the teacher. Liberal arts education is not only a special curriculum but also calls for a particular pedagogy and practice that involves interaction in the classroom. The value that teachers put on education and fields of study greatly influence the pursuit of learning, especially with respect to liberal arts. In many cases the authors note that classrooms and curricula tend to be standardized with no possibility of innovation, and teaching methods tend also to be uniform. Teachers merely communicate the course content with little or no interaction with students. Indeed, teachers of any subject, whether it be mathematics, science, history, or languages, can see the basic value of human development and can work to animate each student to realize his or her full potential. The impact of the faculty is evident from student performance in and outside the classroom in a liberal arts education program. All authors in this book clearly support programs in liberal arts education and believe that the revival of liberal arts could produce well-rounded college graduates. However, no specific ideal curriculum is laid out for any of the developing and transitional countries.

While the global market and economic development are still the main concerns of developing and transitional countries—and liberal arts education is imbedded in western tradition—its revival in developing countries can be understood as a sign that higher educational institutions are concerned about public enlightenment. The Western liberal arts educational model may not be the desirable goal of these developing countries. Instead, their education system should derive their liberal arts educational program from their own history of arts, philosophy, religion, poetry, literature, critical thinking, and politics. Attention to this question is lacking so that discussion on adapting liberal arts education to the culture of developing countries has not been given enough attention. Much evidence in the book suggests that specialized or professional education programs have not been fully successful in respect to global and economic development. The benefit to developing and transitional countries from programs in liberal arts thus ought to be the subject of much discussion among policy makers, educators, and students.

This book on liberal arts education in developing and transitional countries could not have come at a more appropriate time. Liberal arts education programs have played and continue to play a crucial role in the developing world. Readers who are policy makers and educators already involved with liberal arts programs may ask themselves some basic questions. Are they fully and resolutely involved

in liberal arts education to the degree of communicating its spirit to students? Are they consciously concerned about developing in each student the whole person? Without serious answers to these fundamental questions, liberal arts programs to educate the whole person with creativity, critical thinking, moral reasoning and innovation skills will remain wishful thinking. This book is very informative and comprehensive for those interested in liberal arts education and educational reforms in developing countries.

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