


Chapter 1

Core Functions: The Center of Liberating Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents three main functions of a core curriculum as articulated by a variety of ancients, moderns, and contemporaries in order to open a conversation on the function of general education in today's U.S. colleges and universities. There are three main core functions: to provide an education with a reputation of being for the upper class, to provide the skills of reasoning (quantitative, qualitative, empirical, and logical) and the skills of communication (rhetoric, artistic expression, grammar, and dialogue) that allow a student to integrate knowledge and participate at the highest level of leadership in society, and to provide an entry into the pleasurable world of ideas. Today, there also appears a need for specific emphasis on using the core intentionally to invite students into the class of free citizens by building a community for them there, creating spaces for healing, and establishing hope in conciliatory dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

This essay will speak of three main functions of a core curriculum as articulated by a variety of ancients, moderns, and contemporaries in order to open up the conversation of the function of the general education curriculum in today's colleges and universities for current U.S. society. Primarily, I articulate that the three main core functions have been: to provide an education with a reputation of being for the

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upper class, to provide the skills of reasoning (quantitative, qualitative, empirical, and logical) and the skills of communication (rhetoric, grammar, and dialogue) that allow a student to integrate knowledge and participate at the highest level of leadership in society, and to provide an entry into the pleasurable world of ideas. In short, a liberal arts core curriculum acts as a hub that integrates the whole of the student's education and the gloss, skills, and joy of nobility to anyone who partakes.

While this might sound crassly elitist in a democratic society whose foundational faith in the government of all people sometimes takes an anti-intellectual spin, it is worth noting that the concept of liberal arts education began in a democratic society whose educational leaders believed that such education was the key to virtue and fulfillment for all people regardless of social and economic class. Moreover, at specific moments in history, there has been an intentional democratic movement to use Socratic pedagogy in general education to draw more people into the class of leadership. Indeed, this type of intentionality was the mark of revolutionary pedagogy in classical Athens, late antique North Africa, Enlightenment Europe, and the 20th century United States. Thus, it is a pernicious kind of elitism that suggests that liberal arts education is elitist and uses such rhetoric to dissuade or even prevent those in the working class from a general education in a liberal arts core curriculum.

Today, in the third decade of the 21st century, these core functions ought remain central as educators consider how best to educate for leadership a new generation of students, who have been marked especially by trauma from climate change, pandemic, police brutality, systemic racism and patriarchy, gun violence, political polarization, class oppression, and insurrection. There appears a need for specific emphasis on using the core intentionally to invite students into the class of free citizens by building a community for them there, creating spaces for healing, and establishing hope in conciliatory dialogue.

THE SOCRATIC CORE CURRICULUM: INVITING WORKERS TO BE FULL CITIZENS.

Plato's dialogue, *Protagoras*, tells the story of a young man who is seeking help from Socrates to gain access to an education from a famous sophist named Protagoras. Socrates, in his typical fashion, questions the young man (and later the sophist) about why such an education is desirable. At first, the youth simply laughs at the question. Perhaps like many a child of wealth and privilege, he just assumes that everybody knows why education matters. He finally answers that he wants to study with someone who is thought to be marvelously clever. Hippocrates wants an education from a big name that will demonstrate to others that he, himself, must be also wonderfully wise. But Socrates is not satisfied with his young friend's claim to seek a good reputation.

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