

## Promoting Liberal Arts Courses to Social Studies Students

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**Abstract** – Liberal arts education is indeed a key ingredient to the growing manifestation of scientifically-inclined programs in the country. This benefits the relentless explosion of critical-mindedness and problem-solving skills as a balancing principle to the student's learning formation. But, as observed, the moral worth of liberal arts education was not very much underscored in the minds and hearts of the students, particularly the Social Studies students. For this reason, the researcher argues the restoration of the significance of liberal arts education to Social Studies students. This study employs a qualitative research design in the form of critical hermeneutics and document analysis. In addition, it incorporates semi-structured interviews to elucidate the experiences of the Social Studies students in their liberal arts courses. Results have shown that critical reflection is needed to probe into the conscious-unconscious tendency of the students' experience of liberal arts, respect should also be regarded among the liberal arts students diversified cultural backgrounds, and self-mirroring where the liberal arts teacher must be uplifted in the teaching-learning process. To continuously practice these results, the researcher gives an additional context by proposing special topics to students, offering seminars, pieces of training, or workshops for liberal arts professors, and reviewing student evaluation of the school administration to the performance level of students to maintain the given character.

**Keywords** – Critical reflection, liberal arts, respecting differences, self-mirroring, Social studies.

### INTRODUCTION

The fast-changing context of industrialization and globalization paves the way for the automation and mechanization of human activity- a challenging consciousness in this generation. For this reason, global interest goes along with those scientific courses. In return, the minor courses which are supposedly the liberal arts were not given so much emphasis to the fore. It also has this general misconception that those who cannot guarantee their GWA's to those non-BA courses shifted to liberal arts courses that are said to be easier. So far, don't they think liberal arts courses are more than that speculation?

The superfluous number of those graduates in the natural sciences produces a vicious cycle of potential brain drain in the country. While many countries including the industrialized nations of the West import professionals (e.g., medical doctors and nurses), the Philippines export them. This is an indispensable reality in the Philippines to a greater extent because the academic institutions and the government overlooks the strong foundation of liberal arts education. The ability to draw liberal arts education here does not denote that the sciences will

be discarded in the picture. To characterize this point, if natural science graduates lead the world in new inventions and innovations, then their science education cannot be divorced from the liberal arts.

As extracted from the discussion, there is indeed a resurgence of liberal arts education. This has been made possible by Thompson's critical hermeneutics. From this lens, it stimulates a strong emphasis on both the rational and emotive experience of liberal arts students. Also, it identifies cultural sensitivity that can be gleaned from their exposure to liberal arts narratives. Finally, it offers a positive self-regard among teachers as another recipient of liberal arts promotion.

However, the study further recommends liberal arts students must be given specific topics in liberal arts courses that enhance, even more, their twenty-first-century skills. Liberal arts teachers should also attend more seminars, and workshops to facilitate a more caring approach to teaching liberal arts subjects. Likewise, deans, human resource administrators, guidance counselors, and other staff of the College must constantly review the semester evaluation of the learners of the teachers to validate if an appropriate liberal arts approach has been

attained. In the context of the theoretical framework utilized in this study, the researcher encourages future studies to employ another framework that is timely and relevant to today's generation.

In a positive light, science education primarily overcomes the problems of quality of the global environment, depletion of natural resources, increasing poverty, hunger, and illiteracy in many countries and regions of the world [1]. On the one hand, it offers several challenges in this present generation. It attempts to illustrate its immense power to take hold of the everyday workings of man, particularly when students must concede to what they are told to like conforming with technologically-inclined global ideals and that is it ceases to be the only direction for those in the natural sciences is to be bounded with their technical jargons. It also emphasizes that there is only one specific answer to the questions given which results in centers on fact-based knowledge [2]. This can be demonstrated to most adult scientists by copying what is narrated in the books and viewing it as the only source of learning.

For this reason, there is this genius ability to integrate liberal arts with that science education and other fields of specialization since it implies the necessary measure to include other people or groups in one's decision-making process. The failure to do such is a means for the whole to be incapable of achieving a better standard of living. On the side of scientists and other related medical professionals, for instance, can certainly drive innovation by discovering medicines they draw wider and deeper if this invention will give greater impediments to the rest of humanity. For it upholds the principle that an act must produce the greatest amount of pleasure or happiness and maximize and if possible, eliminate pain or suffering. Thus, the rule of thumb is that any act of invention is moral if it produces pleasure while suffering from its counterpart.

Additionally, the conception of liberal arts education cultivates holistic skill and knowledge, a multifaceted ingenuity, which has taken a new picture in the higher education sphere. To fulfill world-class socio-economic and political standards is to require an adaptive, competent, and critical workforce [3]. This simply denotes then an equal recognition that creative-minded people require "core skills" and those relevant for blue-collar jobs.

The skills which enhance the ability to think critically and communicate effectively should go along with arduous bodily work. However, in a broader light, isn't it that emotions can also be elicited in the ultimate intent of liberal arts? That is, creative mindedness necessitates the emotions' role to successfully manifest the significance of liberal arts courses to Social Studies students.

### **Nussbaum's political emotions**

Martha Nussbaum defines political emotions as encompassing the power to advance the functioning of political and democratic processes by facilitating better cooperation and deepening the striving for social justice [4]. Emotions are not bad for the political sphere unless it takes their call to hamper creative dialogue.

This can be summarized as (a) reiterating narrative imagination, and (b) disclosing conventional wisdom and values. In the case of narrative imagination, it stimulates powerfully circulates knowledge, enforces cooperation, produces, and spreads new ideas, sparks change and presents information in a favored, accessible form [5]. This appreciates the role of literature and the humanities that encapsulates all sorts of human activities like writing, drama, and oratorical presentations. When presented on media platforms, the public, particularly the students will imagine the place of those victims of violence for instance. This also incites their active engagement in the political sphere. While this conventional wisdom and values align with unwrapping the well-being of the whole of humanity. When considering this act of face-to-face encounter with those that impose negative emotions, most envelop fear and shady consideration. However, as students as well as citizens, having a voice is a manifestation that political emotion is being actualized in the public, and at the same time, expressing such courage toward crooked results of institutions.

### **Critical Hermeneutics**

This contemporary methodology was initially done as a response to the analytical tradition of philosophy [6]. This argued that the analysis of action should both ruminate on the conscious and unconscious tendencies of the historical world which can be summed up as power, repression, and social

change. On the one hand, there is also an assertion of in-depth interpretation of textual information. It is never to divorce from the practice set by Habermas and Ricoeur as to center with adequacy and critique to interpret the theoretical construct of humans and its action. Lastly, the literature of ordinary language philosophy sorts out inadequately with several problems in the theory of reference and truth. Truth does not align with the subject in itself; it is in the task (of the subject) that reveals the constant blossoming of truth.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study is to restore the significance of liberal arts courses in the consciousness of Social Studies students. The researcher takes this argument since the Social Studies students are taught solely with facts in place of teaching how to think critically of their liberal arts courses. Aligned with this critical mindedness is the ability to empathize, which is not clearly stated in the program outcomes of the Social Studies program.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Research Design

*This study used a qualitative hermeneutical study by Thompson. This is a conglomeration of the philosophical views of Habermas and Ricoeur. Three facets can be drawn from this research design which can be stated as the conceptualization of action that centered on historical conscious-unconscious tendencies, the procedure of interpretation that stems from in-depth ones, and the pursuit of ordinary language philosophy in the context of reference and truth to see the epistemological character of the language.*

#### Participants

The participants in the study were eight (8) Social Studies Students from the Teacher Education Department of Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College Santa Maria Campus. These were all enrolled last second semester for the academic year 2021-2022.

#### Instrumentation

The study utilized semi-structured online interviews to detail the experiences and perceptions of Social Studies students. This attempted to discover the influence of liberal arts courses in their academic pursuits on how to think critically and constructively.

### Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher has written a letter of request to the dean of the College of Teacher Education at Santa Maria Campus to accept the interview request of the students. Upon approval, the researcher proceeded with the in-person interview until it reached the key points needed for discussing the results. These were the main parts of this discussion: personal information and knowledge vis-a-vis experience of their liberal arts courses.

The identity of the participants has been kept confidential. To show this, the researcher utilized a code name to secure their identity. To easily collate the gathered information from the participants, the researcher also asked for their permission for the audio recording. The researcher has the primary responsibility to delete the video recording after transcription and codification.

### Analysis of Data

A document analysis has been carried out by the researcher for both reviewing online journals and other related texts to see the epistemological and pragmatic considerations of cultivating liberal arts in the Social Studies curriculum.

Insofar as this study investigated the experiences of liberal arts courses, this will not probe so much with their negative perceptions; rather, it has considered the affirmative considerations to effectively carry out a sound atmosphere in teaching liberal arts courses.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### The exposition of the historical conscious-unconscious Tendency: Critical reflection

Liberal arts courses' central position is to stimulate the power of reasoning, which aids in bringing to the fore their analysis and interpretation of the topic being discussed. To be exact, there is a great need to intensify their intellectual activities to equalize the function of experience. As one participant stated:

*"I have had this experience before that when reading my notes in one of my liberal arts courses, my focusing suddenly disappears, and suddenly I cannot already proceed with the next section of that said reading."*

Rooting back to the expectation of liberal arts courses, it elevates the ways of thinking of students

to a deeper context. However, it sacrifices the purpose of liberal arts to see unconscious tendencies (emotions). This is reflected in Thompson that “words are connected to the expression of sensation.” To show more of this, participant two opined:

*“I have had a bad experience before with my liberal arts professor since the fundamental idea of it was not emphasized at all, particularly the lack of readings and other platforms to stir critical thinking and creative dialogue.”*

From the participant’s assertion, it draws one’s attention that words, as well as statements, depict the underlying emotive feature of an individual. This dismantles the primitive position that liberal arts courses stay focused in the comfort of abstraction. It is necessary that liberal arts courses should cultivate the art of self-scrutiny of both the conscious and unconscious, for this is a needed facet when they are already practicing their profession. This, when applied to the theory of Nussbaum, points out that the purpose of art in liberal arts is to see the unseen (blind spot) [7]. In detail, if a simple model of instruction of liberal arts education was barely adopted, this would most likely result in a half-baked understanding. As a result, this form of education should keenly observe the unconscious tendencies since this will drive the holistic formation of the liberal arts student.

#### **In-depth interpretation: Respecting others’ differences**

In collaboration with critical reflection as having the power to inculcate the simultaneity of reason and experience, it is also an elementary factor to respect the unique capabilities of another. This supplements liberal arts’ function by heightening the outcome of skills and knowledge of students in this scientific age, as previously mentioned in the introduction. Mainly, the fundamental formation (initial process behind these liberal arts skills) should also be considered. This notion, when applied to this theme, entails active toleration of the needing “other” to resolve the problem of differences. It can be further illustrated with participant three:

*“Liberal arts courses allow me to put myself in the shoe of another, particularly to imagine if what will happen to me when I am*

*in their position (e.g., being underprivilege or walang-wala sa buhay). This, I think, is lacking in other minor and major courses I am taking for this semester.”*

The experience of the participant above affirms the powerful message of liberal arts courses that cannot be seen in the naked eye but felt from within. This necessitates the possibility of recognizing others’ differences in the interior (psychological) dimension of an individual that was not typically discussed in the teaching-learning process. It can also be gleaned as a distinctive trait since the primary view toward differences is a “person with a disability.” To wit, differences can be further interpreted as something that originates from these societal problems such as poverty, corruption, and unemployment.

Also, as an added account by participant four:

*“As major course outcomes of liberal arts students, case studies and essays should be a topmost concern for them to have a say with these insurmountable events in human life.”*

Through liberal arts courses’ teaching strategies, it develops a sense of awareness and responsibility that does not stop from imagining others’ place in society. In detail, by writing essays and case studies, they will raise the discourse in public, specifically those in governmental positions to offer an immediate response in overcoming these differences. However, participant five reacted this way:

*“Liberal arts courses also include extensive activities like simulations and hands-on activities to foster that the proposed written works of Social Studies students’ have face-to-face applicability to their selected communities.”*

Here, the participant exhumes that the horizon of difference can be better comprehended in real-life scenarios since it intends to realize the heterogeneity of cultural backgrounds. When understood in Tagore’s school, to educate children is to enact festivals in the different religions to celebrate diversity [8]. This given medium can bridge the distance between the self, and another’s unique selves which is the potential horror of exclusion.

### Validity and truth: Self-mirroring

Thompson also defends that the meaning of a text or an entity can be subjected to multiple ways. This has been made possible by identifying the other recipient of liberal arts courses. In the previous discussions, it maintains the position that the formation of the students is being put forward. However, as the teaching-learning process suggests, the “other” can also mean the teacher. This can be avowed by participant six:

*“Liberal arts courses’ purpose is indeed a reflexive dialogue between the teacher and students. Reflexivity here means that it is not only the “other” (me as a student) being benefitted, but it is also the teacher.”*

The message above implies the two-directional outcome of the teaching-learning process where the students discover and synthesize new information. At the same time, the teacher can also learn from the insights of her students by way of presenting their rejoinders in class. From thereon, it provides a fusion of horizons from the two vantage points. This, in Nussbaum’s viewpoint, can be illustrated this way: “they (the students) also learn how to “specialize”-how, that is, they might inquire in more depth into at least one unfamiliar tradition-in this way acquiring tools that can later be used elsewhere” [9]. Simply, the meaning behind this catchphrase elucidates that teachers allowing such autonomy to the students must also share their inputs with them, to elucidate and counter-validate the discussion. As added by participant seven:

*“In this twenty-first-century learning, particularly in teaching liberal arts courses, if the learners were characterized with critical-mindedness, problem-solving, and digital literacy, this does not follow a complete autonomy from the teacher, the teacher as the “other” authority for learning, should be the one to initiate and provide this character.”*

Here, liberal arts never entail an intensive emphasis on a “student-centered approach,” the teacher possessing the responsibility to assist and guide her students should remain even over time. Gone are the days when there was this pinpointing element of “teacher and student-centered approach.”

The leading concern should be the back-and-forth aspect of learning where there is an even distribution of knowledge and skills from the students and teachers to say that there is an occurrence of self-mirroring of the “I” and the “other.” This contention was further improved by participant eight:

*“Knowing that the liberal arts teacher has the dominant figure in the teaching-learning process, she can clarify those things that the student can do to maximize his/her learnings.”*

The statement invokes the possibility of complementing the other (students) toward their insufficient knowledge and skills in liberal arts courses. This also means that teacher can validate her function and role as a teacher since she can be brought out their (students’) innate gifts and potentiality. To a great extent, the self-mirroring here can be formally exhibited as it underscores also a promising outcome on the side of the teacher. Thus, divorcing from this supreme emphasis of the other-oriented (student) paradigm.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

As extracted from the discussion, there is indeed a resurgence of liberal arts education. This has been made possible by Thompson’s critical hermeneutics. From this lens, it stimulates a strong emphasis on both the rational and emotive experience of liberal arts students. Also, it identifies cultural sensitivity that can be gleaned from their exposure to liberal arts narratives. Finally, it offers a positive self-regard among teachers as another recipient of liberal arts promotion.

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