

The education of man as man: management and the classical curriculum

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Our secondary and tertiary education systems traditionally stream students into a specialisation in the disciplines of the arts, the sciences or commerce. This is a diversion from the original pedagogical model devised by the Ancient Greeks who promoted the idea of combining the utilitarian model of study with immersion in the classical curriculum, known as *studia humanitatis*. Students were *trained* for professional careers as doctors, lawyers or theologians but they were *educated* to be community leaders.

The *studia humanitatis*, which consisted of five disciplines drawn from the classical curriculum — grammar, poetry, rhetoric, history, and moral philosophy — was revived by the Renaissance humanists in the 15th and 16th centuries and today continues to influence contemporary pedagogical practice in Europe and in the United States. The origins of the *studia humanitatis* are apparent in the French *lycée*, the Italian *liceo classico* and the German *gymnasium* as well as in survey courses for American college students.

The classical curriculum is not commonly practised in the Australian education system. Those charged with managing and directing our companies — the equivalent of the community leaders in Ancient times — are traditionally trained to be experts in accountancy, economics, engineering and science. This is also the demographic of the first degrees of management students who choose to study a Master of Business Administration (MBA) in order to broaden their experience beyond their original specialisation. An MBA continues to be considered *de rigueur* for those wanting promotion to a position of leadership in business.

The management education curriculum, with its staple subjects of accounting, finance, operations, marketing, organisational behaviour, human resources and strategy, is designed to teach students to administer a business. In teaching MBA students to think strategically, management educators also seek to encourage students to stretch themselves beyond their expertise in order to contemplate alternative world views and to

- *The degree to which managers should be trained and the extent to which they should be educated*
- *How a liberal arts education can extend management expertise and enhance independent thinking*
- *The humanist ideals of a trained mind, culture and the benefits of applied knowledge to both the individual and to society*

become aware of the impact of their decisions upon others.

The management literature is replete with books on what makes a good leader. The debate has never been resolved. This article contends that the answer to true leadership lies in a program of studies devised by the Ancient Greeks and later the Renaissance humanists to create independent thinkers who could make wise decisions on behalf of their communities. It argues that managers should be *trained* in the traditional curriculum for business administration, but should be *educated* in the liberal arts.

To train is to instruct, to drill and to subordinate individuals to routines, standards and practices. To educate is to develop the intellectual, moral and aesthetic capacities of individuals. Friedrich Nietzsche argued that education is a form of liberation: therefore this article proposes an extension of the management curriculum to include the liberal arts and thus to promote the education of man as man.

The antecedents of *studia humanitatis*

In his treatise on education, one of the Italian Renaissance's great humanists, Pier Paolo Vergerio,

noted three ways parents can serve the interests of their children: they should exercise care in selecting their names; they should settle their children in renowned cities, and; thirdly, they should instruct their children in the liberal arts.

Vergerio was one of four Italian Renaissance humanists whose pedagogical treatises published in the 15th century revived the principles of the Ancient model of education known as *studia humanitatis*, or the study of the humanities.

The Ancients debated two primary models of educating community leaders: one was dependent on hierarchy; the other celebrated the autonomy of the individual.

The hierarchical model was paternalistic, assuming students were children who lacked the ability to make decisions for themselves and to control their own lives. It was believed students should be supervised and shown how to conduct themselves. In short, it told students what to think.

The alternative was a model one which celebrated the dignity, self-worth and moral autonomy of the individual. It promoted the ideal of a community of citizens, who had the right and the freedom to participate in democratic decision-making processes, and who accepted responsibility and accountability for their decisions.

It promoted the ideal that the individual is solely responsible for defining their life and the manner of their personal conduct. The Ancients were clear: it was not simply enough to theorise about life, but also to live it and to live it well.

In this way, the Greek *paedia* and later, the Renaissance humanistic movement and the *studia humanitatis*, laid the foundations of contemporary management education and opened the debate about the degree to which managers should be trained, and to what extent they should be educated.

This debate dates to the birth of western civilisation. In a letter to the king of the Franks, a Roman emperor extolled the virtues of the classical education, urging his friend to take care that his children were instructed in learning, as an illiterate king was like a crowned donkey.

The Italian Renaissance

The study of the liberal arts was revived during the 15th century at the time of the Italian Renaissance. As part of the educational and cultural reform led by scholars, teachers, writers and civic leaders, the liberal arts were considered an important counterpoint to the contemporary education program. And so the humanist movement found its beginnings.

In 15th century Italy, the overwhelming emphasis was on medieval scholastic education

which comprised practical, pre-professional and scientific studies. The subjects that were part of this utilitarian approach to education included logic, natural philosophy, medicine, law and theology. This program of study prepared men to be doctors, lawyers and professional theologians.

Humanist educators offered a counterpoint to this form of training. They believed that education should have a moral purpose and should fit youths to assume leadership roles in court and in civic life. They wanted to educate the entire social and political elite; they claimed to teach the skills and knowledge necessary for a human being to be truly free — hence the expression, *artes liberales*.

The humanists wanted to create a particular type of person: men and women who would be virtuous, prudent and eloquent. An individual was civilised because they had read and identified with powerful examples of classical virtue. They were prudent because they had extended their human experience into the distant past through the study of history. And they were eloquent because they had studied the most articulate writers and speakers of the past and were thus in turn able to communicate virtue and prudence to others.

A program of teaching and learning

The *studia humanitatis* consisted of five disciplines drawn from the classical educational curriculum, called the 'trivium' (grammar, logic and rhetoric) and the 'quadrivium' (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music).

These subjects had all been outlined in antiquity and bequeathed to Christian Europe by writers such as Cassiodorus in the fifth century and Martianus Capella in the sixth century AD.

The Italian humanists' theory of education is contained in four treatises written by Vergerio (*The Character and Studies Befitting a Freeborn Youth*), Leonardo Bruni (*The Study of Literature to Lady Battista Malatesta of Montefeltro*), Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (*The Education of Boys*), and Battista Guarino (*A Program of Teaching and Learning*). These four works, together with two works of Ancient times, St Basil's *Letter to Young Men* and Plutarch's *On the Education of Children*, formed the foundation of Italian humanist pedagogical writings.

The humanists believed that the ideal way to educate leaders was by immersing students in the best literature of classical antiquity, especially its poetry, history, oratory and moral philosophy.

The Renaissance *studia humanitatis* generally corresponded to what we would call grammar, rhetoric, history, literary studies and moral philosophy, although in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, both history and literary studies were a part of the study of grammar.

Grammar was the study of not only the proper use of language, but also how authors used language to make meaning. Dialectic was the science of disputation, proof and propositions and owed much to the Aristotelian tradition.

Aristotle was also the master of rhetoric, which was the art of persuasion and included all those techniques with language that allowed a speaker to convince an audience of the truth of their argument. The art of rhetoric provided the starting point of three important areas of study: the psychology of the emotions; the use of informal reasoning; and the aesthetics of prose style. In this way, the art of rhetoric is the foundation for the general study of man.

It was considered important to study the Ancients not as an antiquarian exercise but as a source of wisdom to live by and for a linguistic facility that fosters clear thinking and persuasive communication. The curriculum included the study of the works of Plato, Democritus, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Varro, Cicero, Seneca, Augustine, Jerome, Lactantius. For history, students referred to Livy, Sallust, Tacitus, Curtius, Julius Caesar. For poetry they turned to the Greek and Latin writers: Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Euripides, Cicero and Seneca.

'The outcome of these studies is to enable anyone to speak well and to inspire him to act as well as possible,' said Vergerio. 'This is the mark of the greatest men and the absolutely finest characters.'

Management and the classical curriculum

The Renaissance university, the foundation of the contemporary university, stipulated the humanist ideals of a trained mind, culture and the benefits of applied knowledge to both the individual and to society.

Today those ideals are dead. The great 19th century nihilist, Nietzsche, wondered that, having killed God, what is left for our culture to believe in? How can the university function in such a disenchanting world?

Melbourne academic John Carroll argues this point in his book *The Wreck of Western Culture, Humanism Revisited*: '...students now come to university in search of answers to the great metaphysical questions — what to do and how to live. In other words, they seek prophets. But the retort of (German sociologist) Max Weber is that prophets do not belong in university. The lectern is not a pulpit'.

Weber claimed there were three functions left for the modern university: the advancement of knowledge; the teaching of methods of thinking;

and the imposition of clarity and consistency of thinking within the framework of already given ultimate values. 'But under the pall of Nietzsche's scepticism about the value of knowledge, Weber is only enthusiastic about the third function — the imposition of clarity and consistency of thinking within the framework of already given ultimate values,' writes Carroll. 'But it depends on already given ultimate values, the lack of which stimulated his enquiry in the first place. Weber's argument thus collapses into futility.'

Scholarship, the pursuit of excellence and of truth, is frequently represented as indulgent and irrelevant and those who pursue knowledge are seen to be elitist, out-of-touch and marginal. Frank Furedi, in his book *Where have all the intellectuals gone?* is predictably critical of how tertiary and postgraduate education, and management education in particular, stifles intellectual endeavour. He writes: 'the marginalisation of intellectual passion in higher education (is) the unintended consequence of a new ethos of managerialism that dominates intellectual and cultural life'. Furedi says we have created a 'cult of the banal' in our 'celebration of ordinariness'.

A decade earlier, Harold Bloom predicted the demise of scholarship and the pursuit of knowledge for its own ends in his celebrated *The Western Canon*. He wrote that 'We are destroying all intellectual and aesthetic standards in the humanities and social sciences, in the name of social justice. Our institutions show bad faith in this: no quotas are imposed on brain surgeons or mathematicians. What has been devalued is learning as such, as though erudition were irrelevant in the realms of judgment and misjudgment'.

In other forums I have argued that one of the consequences of the apparent belief that 'training' is synonymous with 'education' is the inability, or worse, the unwillingness, of students to engage in robust debate. University students avoid arguing with their lecturers; lecturers are reluctant to engage in debate. Where students commonly interject, it is with fatuous remarks such as 'whatever', 'don't go there', 'but that's how I feel', or 'what's the relevance?'.

The demise of the practice of debate, as defined by Aristotle, in contemporary times can be attributed to the two most popular philosophical movements of the 20th century: relativism and post-modernism. To argue is considered adversarial: it is a form of bullying and an act of intolerance. In our defence of 'politically correct' language we are sensitive in the extreme to causing offence and in so doing have killed debate and the exchange of ideas. No wonder Furedi says that, as a society, we have sunk into mediocrity.

Conclusion

The study of the humanities as part of the education of future leaders remains a feature of the university system in Europe and in the United States but, in Australia, it is traditional practice to 'stream' students into one of the main disciplines — the humanities, the sciences or commerce.

For many generations it was considered appropriate, perhaps even manly, for boys to be encouraged to study mathematics, chemistry and physics; girls were more inclined to study languages, literature and history. English, however, is a compulsory subject, and it is predictable that boys with little experience in writing essays, or little encouragement to read a novel, poem or play, approach the subject with trepidation.

Anecdotal evidence from my own experience of teaching MBA students indicates that, despite their being postgraduate students, their confidence in writing an essay, and their ability to form and to defend an argument, is a skill many have forgotten, or maybe have never mastered. This may not be at all surprising to those who have never been stretched by a teacher, encouraged to visit a library, lost themselves in a book, or been inspired by a clever turn of phrase.

Is the study of the liberal arts an unnecessary indulgence? Is it fair for a management student to ask, 'what is the relevance?'. Is *studia humanitatis* a relic of an ancient education system that has no place in today's rapidly-changing world economy? For those management students who think it's acceptable to cheat in an exam, or who think to research means 'to Google', this is probably the case. To enrol in a course about how education teaches us to be free, sophisticated and civilised individuals is a waste of time...and money.

There are others, however, who appreciate Craig Kallendorf's comments that to revisit the past means to care about accurate expression, moral character and a sense of connection to the history of our civilisation. 'Knowledge of the past', says Renaissance humanist Leonardo Bruni, 'gives guidance to our counsels and to our practical judgment. The consequence of similar undertakings [in the past] encourages or deters us according to our circumstances in the present'.

To teach means to arouse curiosity, not to sate it. Alexander the Great declared that he owed no less to his teacher Aristotle than to Philip his father, because from the latter he had only received life, but from the former he had received the good life. 'Law, medicine, business; these are noble pursuits,' says the teacher played by Robin Williams in *Dead Poets' Society*. 'But love, passion, beauty, romance — these are what we stay alive for.'

Parents still name their children and it is

chance, not choice, which gives a man his country. 'But everyone acquires for himself the liberal arts and virtue itself, and these are the most desirable things a person can seek,' says Vergerio. 'For wealth, glory, pleasures — these are transitory and fleeting. Character, however, and the fruits of the virtues endure undiminished and last forever.'

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