Review Article

The Paradox of University EFL: A Liberal Arts Subject without Liberal Arts Content

Ross Taylor

Abstract

This paper reviews the history, substance and importance of a liberal arts philosophy and content in education including Greek, Roman, Renaissance and later development of the philosophy, up to recent debate and research on the issue. The writer argues that certain trends in EFL, in particular, learner-centred curricula, the idea of language proficiency and the expansion of ESP, have resulted in a paradox: a liberal arts subject without liberal arts content. It is argued that the benefits of a classical, if updated, liberal arts education remain vastly superior to what EFL teachers are currently offering and that we ignore the educational thinking of some of the greatest minds of the last 2,500 years at our peril. It is questioned whether there is any coherent rationale behind this departure from a liberal arts philosophy and suggested that all EFL educators reconsider liberal arts content and consequent lifelong benefits for the student.

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> "Among all the departments of knowledge the ancients assigned seven to be studied by beginners, because they found in them a higher value than in the others, so that whoever has thoroughly mastered them can afterwards master the rest rather by research and practice than by the teacher's oral instruction"
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> (Hugo, 1120, p. 3)

As an EFL teacher of undergraduates in a liberal arts faculty, recently my mind has constantly been returning to the same theme. Undergraduates are in our care for four years. In the course of their degree, English majors certainly attain a high level of English language proficiency. In EFL terms, this must mean that we have fulfilled our objectives and have done a good job. However the thought keeps recurring that, despite this, we are somehow failing in the education of our students. On reflection, I wonder if the whole TEFL industry is producing students who are technically able but who are essentially ignorant. I do not use ignorant in a pejorative sense. When I left university myself, I believe I was also extremely ignorant of many of the important, and to some extent, timeless thoughts and issues central to the human experience, and am extremely conscious of what I have yet to learn. However, I believe that in the EFL

world we are not really attempting to address this problem in any consistent way.

Randy Pausch, Professor of Computer Science at Carnegie Mellon University, was very close to death when he gavehis moving valedictory "The Last Lecture". He did not lecture on "pixels, multi-screen work stations and the information superhighway" (Pausch, 2008, p. 40) which were arguably the areas in which he was expert. He titled his lecture "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams". Like myself, born into the postmodern world of the 1960's with its "implosion of meaning" (Hebdige, 2006), he appears almost embarrassed to admit what he really valued in education and aspired to in the lecture that summed up his life. "Throughout my academic career, I'd given some pretty good talks. But being considered the best speaker in a computer science department is like being known as the tallest of the Seven Dwarfs. And right then, I had the feeling that I had more in me, that if I gave it my all, I might be able to offer people something special. 'Wisdom' is a strong word, but maybe that was it" (Pausch, 2008, p. 6). Of course, it is a foolish teacher who pretends that they are 'wise', and I certainly do not. But if wisdom is "the power of judging rightly and following the soundest course of action, based on knowledge, experience, understanding, etc." (Webster's New World College Dictionary) why are we not even attempting to develop a curriculum strategy that will, at the very least, give students the building blocks that they can use as tools of progression toward this goal throughout their lives?. Perhaps the death of religion has had something to do with making wisdom such an unfashionable word

(and goal), as some form of wisdom seems to be central to most religious teaching. However, are we not guilty of throwing the baby out with the bathwater if we reject (as I do) religion, and with it reject the value of this teaching goal?. Can you as the reader, in your quetest and most reflective moment, honestly say that providing students with a basis to develop the power of judging rightly and following the soundest course of action, based on knowledge, experience and understanding should not be one of our teaching objectives, however short we may fall of reaching it?

Solomon had this to say on the subject: "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels...fools despise wisdom and instruction. Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (The Proverbs of Solomon 1.5; 4.5-7).

The thing is, there can be no language teaching without some form of content. Content-less language is a contradiction in terms. Otherwise we will have meaningless babble using English words and phrases. If we cannot avoid some form of content, why do we not have a strategy of content that provides students with these "wisdom building blocks"?

The EFL world appears to be divided into many camps. Some teachers argue that the content does not

matter at all. Provided that the students are practising and progressing in the four language skills, that content is irrelevant. The problem with this is that I believe that this has a tendency to produce what I have referred to as technically proficient but essentially ignorant students. I do not believe that language skills can be so easily separated from thinking skills, and thinking skills cannot be separated from knowledge and therefore content. Even if I am wrong, however, and if content is irrelevant, are we not missing a golden opportunity that the students may never have again to introduce them to some of the most wonderful ideas and experiences drawn from the human experience?

Other teachers believe passionately that content should be student-led and that this increases student motivation and enjoyment, and therefore improves language learning. Well, I have introduced EFL students to Shakespeare, Melville, Fitzgerald, Eliot and many others and have not noticed any lower level of interest than when they were making presentations about the life of Britney Spears. However, I do feel that I have introduced them to something of value that they can return to later in life if they wish, that they might never have experienced otherwise. Small steps in the pursuit of wisdom perhaps, but steps nonetheless.

I do not feel at all embarrassed at wishing to introduce students to these authors or other major components of a classical liberal arts education and I do not see why teachers have become so shy of introducing students to such material. We are all born ignorant and we cannot

discover everything by ourselves. Throughout my life I have constantly been introduced to the most wonderful literature, art, and music, whether by teachers, friends or through my own inquisitiveness. I believe we are failing our students if we do not seek to provide them with similar introductions. Students can learn about Britney or Harry Potter anywhere. They do not need to pay good money to a university to achieve this.

If it is accepted that it is desirable to have some form of content strategy over an EFL degree, what should this content be? This question may not be possible to answer in any absolute sense; however, that does not mean that we should therefore abandon our attempts at finding an answer, however approximate that may be. One of the largest (and most expensive) investigations into education in the United States was the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, beginning in 1967 (Kaplan, 1980, p. 1). One criticism of the findings of the Commission that is relevant to this discussion was offered by Sidney Hook: "There is hardly a facet of the mechanics and organization of higher education that it does not treat, exhaustively and objectively…What it does *not* do is address itself to the most important questions that can be asked about higher education: What should its content be? What should we educate for, and why? What constitutes meaningful liberal education in modern times, as distinct from mere training for a vocation?" (Hook, 1975, p. 1).

I cannot attempt to answer this vexed question in this short paper. However, I would like to make some observations on EFL teaching and how far we have moved (and remain

in the process of moving) away from a core content in our degrees that are designed to provide our students with a sound basis in human knowledge and great thinking. Paradoxically, language is a liberal arts subject. However, within the teaching of EFL, there is almost no liberal arts content. In the context of TEFL then, I believe it is vital to re-explore the liberal arts philosophy of education and resurrect its importance.

A Historical Perspective

To understand the term liberal arts (liber is Latin for free) we need to appreciate that in ancient Greek and Roman times this was the education that was thought appropriate for the freeman, as opposed to the artes illiberales, which was essentially vocational training. Right at the outset then, there appears the tension that remains unresolved in universities today. This is the conflict of the perception of education as the acquisition of knowledge and thinking skills, and education as the acquisition of skills that are believed to be of direct value in the workplace. We shall return to this conflict later. In Classical times, this tension was dealt with by providing two systems of education, somewhat analogous to the old division between universities and polytechnics in England, or universities and rajabhats in Thailand today.

The seven liberal arts were divided into two groups, the Trivium, an "elementary" group composed of grammar; rhetoric; and dialectic (logic). The second group, the Quadrivium, was composed of geometry; arithmetic; music; and astronomy (Willman, 1907, p. 2).

The general idea of a liberal arts education was to provide the students with a grounding of what was regarded as essential general knowledge and to develop the intellectual capacities and thinking skills of the students. Before we are inclined to lightly dismiss this educational philosophy, it is worth reflecting on the people who had some form of input into the development of the liberal arts curriculum: Socrates, Pythagoras, Plato, Cicero, Augustine, da Vinci, Bertrand Russell, and many others up to the present (Willman, 1907, pp. 2-3; Blunt, 1985, p. 49). I for one am extremely reluctant to have the arrogance to assume, as I am afraid many EFL teachers do, that I know better than such intellectual giants.

It is also interesting to note that our predecessors did not suffer from the current embarrassment, or even incredulity, in mentioning the idea of wisdom as an educational objective. Alcuin of York, adviser to Charlemagne, also referred to The Proverbs of Solomon in one of his surviving treatises on the Trivium (Willman, 1907, p. 4). Of course, this could either mean that I am in good company or that my thinking is 1,300 years out of date.

The Case for Liberal Arts Today

Numerous different arguments are made by those who champion the seemingly losing liberal arts cause today. Victor E. Ferrall summarises some of them which he refers to as "disingenuous" (a label with which I do not agree): "(1) A liberal arts education teaches students how to think

critically; (2) A liberal arts education best provides oral and written communication skills; (3) A liberal arts education is an 'international education' ", amongst others (Ferrall, 2008, pp. 1-2, my rephrasing). Although an ardent supporter of a liberal arts education, he observes that there is no evidence to support any of these assertions. However, I do not think that historical experience or the input of some of the greatest thinkers of all time should be dismissed without a cogent alternative, and this I do not see. There is certainly no evidence that I have encountered that is contrary to these arguments, so I do not agree that they need be discarded. Ferrall does, however, advance three additional arguments that he believes are central to today's debate, with which I broadly agree:

1. It is the abstract nature of a liberal arts education that makes it so effective.

This is turning the argument of opponents to a liberal arts education that it is not "useful" (however we define usefulness) on its head. It is the very "uselessness of what liberal arts students study that opens the door to their appreciating knowing for the sake of knowing...that learning is of value in and of itself whether or not it leads directly to a marketable skill" (Ferrall, 2008, p. 2). What he is talking about here is really apparent uselessness. I cannot conceive of anything more useful to students than providing them with a foundation of knowledge and thinking skills with life-long rather than transitory value.

2. The best [undergraduate?] teaching is at liberal arts colleges.

Ferrall makes the point that because of the various financial and other pressures on universities we inescapably tend to focus on specialization, not breadth. Full professors in the West rarely teach an undergraduate course. Ferrall refers to the case of a Nobel laureate complaining to him about being required to teach an undergraduate seminar. "I'm a professor, not a teacher" (Ferrall, 2008, p. 2). In some universities with a rich liberal arts tradition, nowadays liberal arts courses are no more than paid lip-service to and regarded as "foundation" or "elementary" courses. I know of one example in an excellent university where "The Western Humanities" is such a course. The course, in one semester (to many rather baffled Asian students), makes a wide sweep over Western Civilization, from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Ancient and Classical Greece, Rome, to the Crusades, the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment, the American and French Revolutions, Romanticism, Modernism and Post-Modernism. They study all this in their first year at university. It is only after three years of study that students are permitted to progress to much higher level courses, such as "English for Work" and similar ESP courses, the merit of which is discussed further below.

Ferrall's final argument is a bold claim indeed:

3. Your life will be fuller and richer if you have read Aristotle, Descartes and Rousseau (Ferrall, 2008, p. 3).

To avoid an appearance of "Western" bias which is

certainly not intended, I think we can safely add The Buddha, Confucius and many others of "Eastern" origin. In any event, these are only examples to make the point. Why should we be embarrassed in seeking to assist students in leading a richer and fuller life? Or gaining some form of wisdom? Why do we invest so much time and energy in designing courses that are assumed (probably wrongly) to maximize the future earning potential of our students when their development as well-rounded, educated individuals is ignored? The irony is that we continue to do this even though we are completely aware that money, whilst necessary, cannot and does not lead to happiness. A famous ex-prime minister of Thailand is perhaps the best recent example of this.

Liberal Arts vs. Vocational

I would also argue that vocational training is generally ineffective and easily outdated. Ferrall observes that whereas "career directed courses are always of limited value; a liberal [arts] education is always enriching. The wise person, therefore, seeks both a liberal [arts] education and an on-the-job career education" (Ferrall, 2008, p. 3). For those considering the arguments in this paper who might be tempted to think that both Ferrall and I belong to the school of thought of the older generation that wishes to remake today's universities in the image of the universities they themselves attended, you could not be more mistaken. Both Ferrall and I had an essentially vocational training at law school. I was an undergraduate at one of the most highly-rated law schools in England, followed by further vocational training as a barrister in a specialist school at the Inns of Court. I

realized in my first few days of pupilage (apprenticeship to a practicing barrister), and was indeed informed of this by my pupil master, that virtually everything I had learned in this long sequence of vocational training was useless in practice. He was correct. I am far from seeking to revisit the education of my youth and impose that on the students of today. Rather, I am seeking to propose the education that, knowing what I now know, I wish I had had.

Athanasios Moulakis, who wrestles with the problem of providing professional education for today's engineers, is also skeptical about the value of in-school vocational training: "It is an error to believe that all that needs to be known can be taught and that it can be taught in school. College does not produce ready-made educated men and women who can rest on an accumulation of factual knowledge. Instead, it provides [or should provide] students with a mass of useful information, and an opportunity to develop cognitive tools, habits of analysis and understanding, and an elasticity of mind that lays the foundation for lifelong learning" (Moulakis, 1994, p. 11). I would argue that this is precisely what a true liberal arts education does. Providing our students with a mass of useful information, and an opportunity to develop cognitive tools, habits of analysis and understanding, and an elasticity of mind that lays the foundation for lifelong learning is the best possible goal that we can have as EFL teachers and we should constantly question ourselves and the curricula we provide as to whether we are anywhere near achieving this.

In providing a language degree, the task is surely easier for us than those like Moulakis who are trying to provide a liberal arts input into scientific education for a rapidly changing technological world. In *Beyond Utility* he articulates this conundrum:

> "The problems of providing engineers with a rounded education are not new....the same themes recur with remarkable constancy. Study after study, in the twenties, the forties, the fifties, down to the nineties.....has come up with a similar analysis of the need to provide both a general and professional education at the same time. Each has pointed to the contradictions that arise from this double pursuit. The recommendations for action across the decades, all advocating a strengthening of liberal studies, are also remarkably similar"
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> (Moulakis, 1994, p. 5).

A recent study has attempted to throw light on whether occupational and professional programs actually do prepare students better for the 21st Century than a liberal arts program. "During the past thirty years, interest in the traditional arts and science fields has been dramatically in decline, while interest in occupational and professional programs has exponentially increased. Students seeking majors closely connected with careers have been consistently and increasingly choosing to study more occupationally oriented majors" (Seifert, 2008, p. 1). The study developed three areas which were associated with success in the knowledge economy: Professional Competency, Cross-Cultural Cooperation and Citizenship Competency, and Technical Competency.

Professional Competency was defined as:

- Developing original ideas or products
- Improving thinking and reasoning skills
- Developing problem-solving skills
- Speaking and writing effectively
- Developing leadership skills
- Developing ethical standards

Cross-Cultural Cooperation and Citizenship Competency was defined as:

- Getting along with people of different attitudes and opinions from one's own
- Interacting with people from different racial groups and cultures different than one's own
- Awareness of environmental issues
- Understanding international issues
- Working as a team member
- Exercising one's rights, responsibilities and privileges as a citizen

Technical Competency was defined as:

- Applying scientific knowledge and skills
- Applying mathematics and statistics
- Applying computer and technological skills

Whilst there is room for debate on the criteria used within these definitions, I do not see any significant criticism. It was found in a survey of alumni from three

graduation cohorts (Classes 1974-76; 1984-86; and 1994-96) of 30 private and public colleges in the U.S., that with business majors as the comparison group, alumni who majored in the traditional arts and sciences reported distinctly greater development in both professional and cross-cultural competencies, with the exception of arts and humanities majors who were not advantaged in their cross-cultural competency development (although they remained advantaged in their professional competencies) (Seifert, 2008, p. 2). In addition, the results suggested "that alumni who attended a liberal arts college, compared to a comprehensive university, reported greater level of college impact on the development of professional and cross-cultural competencies but no difference in terms of developing technical competencies" (Seifert, 2008, p. 3).

There is therefore recent compelling evidence that liberal arts education does in fact deliver what it claims and that the knowledge and thinking skills learned stay with the student, providing a sound basis for success in our rapidly changing world. There is certainly a need for more research in this area.

There are certain features about language teaching and learning in general, and the way EFL teaching worldwide has developed in particular, that have, I believe, gradually led EFL teaching into a wasteland of erratic, arbitrary, low-quality and frequently vocational content, when there is a neglected and rich tradition of liberal arts material crying out to be dusted off and tapped into. I discuss some of these features below.

EFL and Learner Centred Curricula

One of the difficulties in language teaching is the tension described by Nunan as a tension between the subject-centred and learner-centred views of language and language learning: "A perennial tension in language teaching is between those who subscribe to a subject-centred view and those who subscribe to a learner-centred view of language and language learning. The subject-centred view sees learning a language as essentially the mastering of a body of knowledge. The learner-centred view, on the other hand, tends to view language acquisition as a process of acquiring skills...Both viewpoints are quite valid, and most courses will reflect elements of both" (Nunan, 1988, p. 24). Although it is true that most university curricula still reflect both of these views, my observation of EFL teachers is that in training and practice it is the learner-centred view that is in the ascendancy. The result of this has been a shift away, not only from language as a body of knowledge, which I would not disagree with, but a shift away from the value attached by teachers to any kind of knowledge. In the context in which I am writing, this includes knowledge of the liberal arts. Thus the result of an apparently enlightened view of language teaching has had the consequence of focusing on skill acquisition where knowledge base is seen as being largely irrelevant to the acquisition of those skills. And yet I see no valid reason why the same skills cannot be learned and indeed strengthened on a liberal arts knowledge base.

Brindley's views are typical of this kind of TEFL thinking: "...the learner should be seen as being at the

centre of the educational process. For the teaching institution and the teacher, this means that instructional programmes should be centred around learners' needs and that learners themselves should exercise their own responsibility in the choice of learning objectives, content and methods, as well as in determining the means used to assess their performance" (Brindley, 1984, p. 15). In my view, this extreme extension of the idea of learner-centred curricula results in nonsense. Firstly, it is arrogant in the extreme to imply that somehow advocates of learner-centred education somehow "care more" for students' needs. What greater need does a student have but to be equipped with the kind of lifelong skills that I have described as a virtue of a liberal arts education? With regards to content, how can a student be responsible for choice of content if the student is not introduced and exposed to content of which they would otherwise be unaware? Why are teachers so reluctant to admit that they may actually know something that students do not, and see it as part of their role to introduce students to such knowledge?

This kind of thinking leads to a devaluation of the role of EFL teacher into some kind of wannabe student friend and classroom edutainment moderator. In a recent example I am aware of, an EFL teacher spent a large part of a university semester with students studying "Charlie's Angels" or some similar cinematic masterpiece. The justification was "the students chose it themselves and they were improving their listening and speaking skills". The improvement of listening and speaking skills involved was, in itself, doubtful. Even if that were true, if cinema is to be used as a tool to

activate speaking and listening skills, why on earth miss the opportunity to use a major critically acclaimed work? The list of possible candidates, both old and new is almost endless. Reed's "The Third Man"; Lean's "Lawrence of Arabia"; the Cohen brother's "Fargo" are mere examples of a rich source of material. How did this course possibly add to the the students' understanding of the human condition and provide them with tools for future development?

The Idea of Language Proficiency

Humboldt believed that language education is primarily about "the absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity" (Humboldt, 1854, p. 48). I believe that a liberal arts foundation to EFL would continue to achieve this. However, another feature of language teaching is, I believe, in direct contrast to Humboldt's views and has had a similar effect to the impact of views on learner-centred education. This is the influence of the idea of language proficiency on the EFL curriculum. "A proficiency-oriented language curriculum is not one which sets out to teach learners linguistic or communicative competence, since these are merely abstractions or idealizations: rather, it is organized around the particular kinds of communicative tasks the learners need to master and the skills and behaviours needed to accomplish them. The goal of a proficiency-based curriculum is not to provide opportunities for the learners to 'acquire' the target language: it is to enable learners to develop the skills needed to use language for specific purposes" (Richards, 1985, p. 5). It is interesting to note the mention by Richards of "language for specific

purposes". I discuss the impact of English for Specific Purposes below. One of the problems with this approach to language teaching from a liberal arts point of view is that it inevitably leads away from the use of classical or canonical materials as a content base for language learning, because these materials are unlikely to be associated in the minds of EFL teachers with the communicative tasks being taught, instead of telephone skills, meeting skills, or the communication skills required when meeting someone at a bus-stop (no, I regret I am not joking, these are all being taught at universities somewhere in the EFL world).

This idea of language proficiency seems to be one of the factors behind the language element of the much criticized Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) which has recently been imposed across much of Europe. Fulcher argues that the CEFR serves "a philosophy in which language is no longer the key to understanding culture, humanity and communication, but rather the means to ensuring economic prosperity" (Fulcher, 2008, p. 22). He continues to refer to an article in a popular Swiss magazine: "Recently, education has been made the subject of public discussion from the point of view of economic usability. It is seen as some important human resource and must contribute to an optimization of location in a global competition as well as the smooth functioning of social partial systems. Whereas education in former times was associated with the development of individuality and reflection, the unfolding of the muse and creativity, the refinement of perception, expression, taste and judgment, the main things today are the acquisition of competence, standardisation and effective

educational processes as well as accreditation and evaluation of educational outcomes" (*Swiss Magazine*, June 2007, in Fulcher, 2008, p. 22). One of the problems as I see it is that there is an underlying simplistic and, I suspect, politically populist approach to how economic usability is perceived. If the outcome of Seifert's research, discussed above, is generally applicable (and I accept that this remains to be seen) it would seem that in fact, a liberal arts foundation has in fact far greater economic utility, whilst providing the student with additional life, learning and critical thinking skills.

English for Specific Purposes

Linked to the idea of language proficiency has been the growth of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. As far as I can tell, this type of course is being given greater and greater precedence in undergraduate EFL curricula. This of course has the inevitable effect that students are exposed to much more ESP type content, and less and less liberal arts type content. Whilst I have no objection to ESP courses as additional or even postgraduate courses, I have serious doubts about their place in an undergraduate curriculum. In addition, in my experience, the majority of ESP type courses (there is also a sub-branch referred to as English for Business Purposes (EBP)) offer a mix of English language teaching and vocational training. I have already made numerous observations on the value of vocational training when compared to the value of a liberal arts education and I shall not repeat them. One of the problems with courses of this nature is that they gradually transform a degree into something it was never intended to be: a smattering

of vocational training in a number of fields studied over a number of semesters. If specific vocational training in one area is questionable, this kind of amateur vocational training taught by teachers with no real qualifications or experience in the work field must, I believe, be of infinitely lower value.

Great claims are made for ESP. "Study of languages for specific purposes has had a long and interesting history going back, some would say, as far as the Roman and Greek Empires" (Dudley-Evans, 1998, p. 1). It is interesting to note that the "some" are not identified or referenced. To be charitable, Dudley-Evans may be referring to the *artes illiberales,* or vocational training. To suggest that ESP has its roots in the liberal arts of classical antiquity would, I suspect, have Socrates and Plato revolving in their graves. However, they have thankfully been spared this. The writer continues with this grand introduction on the import of ESP: " Since the 1960's, ESP has become a vital and innovative activity within the Teaching of English as a Foreign or Second Language Movement.....the massive expansion of international business has led to a huge growth in the area of English for Business Purposes...Within ESP the largest sector for published materials is now that of Business English, and there is a burgeoning interest from teachers, publishers and companies in this area" (Dudley-Evans, 1998, p. 2). Perhaps, but that is not the point. The largest sector for published materials in Thailand is now probably translated versions of Manga comics. Popular appeal has never and can never be evidence of any intrinsic merit, and if we allow this to affect undergraduate curriculum design at the expense of finding ways of introducing our students to major and generally

acclaimed works, events and thinking that are of great significance to humanity, then I believe we are doing them a great disservice.

Failing to deal with or, apparently, even recognize the serious limitations of the vocational training element of ESP courses, those who espouse ESP make this kind of sweeping statement "There is a more general recognition that language teaching needs to take on board the business context within which communication takes place. In the more closely linked business world that has resulted in developments in technology such as telecommunications, computer networking, e-mail and video-conferencing, it is vital for people to communicate effectively across borders and to bridge cultural gaps" (Dudley-Evans, 1998, p. 30). I have to confess that, having spent some five years studying various aspects of intercultural communication for my PhD, I am utterly mystified why ESP is somehow being claimed to enable people to "communicate effectively across borders and to bridge cultural gaps". Intercultural communication is about understanding the values, habits and behaviours of different social groups, understanding how these issues affect interaction and communication between members of such social groups, understanding our own values, habits and behaviours and how they affect our thinking and communication, how stereotypes affect our perceptions of others and similar issues. This is all knowledge and skills that can best be developed through the study of intercultural communication itself, and the research I have referred to above shows that liberal arts courses best develop such skills for use in later life.

The arguments frequently raised in favour of the inclusion of more ESP type courses in the curriculum are that, together with teaching English, they are teaching related skills that will be useful to the students in the marketplace after graduation. This is an argument of "usefulness" which implicitly accepts the criticism of liberal arts type courses that they are "useless", an argument we have already explored and I hope, shown as less than convincing. Ironically, courses that are claimed to be "useful" are in fact frequently *less* useful because not only are they rapidly outdated but more importantly they omit the development in the students of the necessary thinking, learning and life skills that can be used and developed throughout the student's lifetime. The following example is illustrative in an article written for the education section of a major Thai English language newspaper: "Employers grumble that their employees know Plato but don't know how to operate fax machines. In response, schools have increasingly become job training centres" (Page, 1998, p. 1). This is an excellent example because it was written ten years ago. Fax machines are now rarely used in business, although I believe many ESP (or EBP) students are still being taught how to prepare a fax cover sheet properly. When I first used a fax machine, I believe it took me no more than a few minutes to work out how to do it. This kind of training or its current equivalent (and I am sure we can all think of many examples) has no place to my mind in a quality university curriculum, and no connection with the liberal arts whatsoever.

I do not question the good intentions of those who seek to develop more ESP courses and include them in curricula. Of course it is right to be concerned about the employment

prospects of students once they graduate, but I believe this issue is much more complex than the provision of a smattering of basic entry-level skills to various occupations, which in the workplace would be rapidly acquired anyway. The problem is the opportunity in providing the students with much greater knowledge and longer lasting skills that is being overtaken in the process. "When education kowtows to the marketplace, humanity is the loser. Educating a young person solely for the job market is one of the worst sins a teacher can commit, because it denies the student's wholeness" (Page, 1998, p. 1).

The Problem of the Crowded Curriculum

One of the facts of life all undergraduate educators have to face is the crowded curriculum and language curricula are no exception. This inevitably involves choices. It is my belief, founded on curriculum observation, that the inclusion of ESP type courses results in a degree moving away from a liberal arts philosophy. Practical issues also need to be remembered. Many courses are electives and therefore optional. The consequence of this is if we are not careful, students can navigate their way through a degree from elective to elective on a succession of ESP courses, the consequence of which "re-designs" their degree effectively into vocational training of highly questionable value. Degrees for the professions have perhaps an even harder task of retaining a core of liberal arts courses in the curriculum (a task that was abandoned completely in the university I attended). "The expansion of curricula in the hope of covering a growing number of subjects naturally leads to the dilution of the

courses taught. It is evident that teaching programs must be rethought and restructured in order to keep pace with the development and differentiation of human knowledge. But it is not possible to expand existing teaching programs ad infinitum…An educated human being must be informed, but an education…is not a heap of information. Critical habits of mind and a maturity of judgment do not, of course, develop in the abstract. Skills are always linked to factual knowledge, to stuff, but they are not the stuff. In all humanistic-social work the objective must be not 'coverage of subject matter' but development of interest and enthusiasm *together* with sufficient knowledge that the student may continue his reading at his leisure and with some confidence that he knows what he is doing" (Moulakis, 1994, p. 127).

How might Liberal Arts content be integrated in EFL teaching?

The unanswered question at the end of the Carnegie Commission remains, as to what content we ought then to be teaching and in our context as part of 21st Century EFL teaching. I have already observed it is not possible for me to attempt an answer here, although at some point in the future I shall. We can however derive guidance and support on the central importance of content from educational theory, and I would argue that this content should be drawn from the classical liberal arts tradition. Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan (Cloud et al., 2000, p.113) describe three major categories of goals necessary for the academic success of language learners: content goals; language goals; and general skills goals. "Content goals …[are]… conceptual learning

(knowledge and skills) and orientations and attitudes required by specific content areas" (Richard-Amato, 2005, p. 199). This is where a curriculum that is refocused on liberal arts content needs to be developed. "Language goals are linguistic goals (e.g. vocabulary and grammar structures) and communicative goals (e.g. stating one's opinion)...They also include *content-obligatory* language [language necessary for the specific subject matter] and *content-compatible* language [general language skills and knowledge which can be used across a variety of subject areas]....General skills consist of the acquisition and practice of study skills, research skills, learning strategies and social skills" (Richard-Amato, 2005, p. 199). The point is that these goals would be integrated, and the considerable advantages of a liberal arts knowledge included within EFL education.

Conclusion

EFL teaching, with its worldwide explosion in the globalising world of the latter part of the 20th Century, takes many shapes and forms, with materials and pedagogy used in one context frequently "crossing-over" into another context. At universities, where we provide education to undergraduates to hopefully enable them to meet the challenges of a future that none of us can anticipate, to help them develop thinking skills and a perspective on life and the human condition that will grow and adapt to meet these challenges, we need to be very careful about importing these materials and pedagogy without consciously examining the direction they are taking us in, or to put it another way, what they are taking us away from. I believe that certain characteristics of language teaching

and EFL teaching have gradually had the combined effect of producing students who are technically proficient in English but who are essentially ignorant of the major events, ideas and works that have shaped the world today and will continue to have a major influence on the world of the future. We need to look at the curricula we are providing and compare it to a curriculum based on a genuine liberal arts philosophy and honestly ask ourselves if what we are providing is superior, as I believe we are providing something that is vastly inferior. If we are to reject the value of the liberal arts canon, we should be "upfront" in doing so, justify and give cogent reasons supported by evidence as to why what we are teaching is superior. The response that liberal arts material is too difficult for EFL students is patronizing and, in my experience, completely untrue.

I am arguing for curriculum revision and for further detailed research on the comparative effectiveness and value of these competing university curricula. I am confident in the outcome of such research but do not prejudge it. I believe that as an educator there is nothing wrong in admitting that, yes, actually, I do know more than my students do and have confidence that the content I am introducing my students to will develop their intellectual capacities, serve them far beyond the confines of university and provide them with the hard-won benefit of the knowledge of major world thinkers, and yes, if at all possible, try to give them some tools to search for not only economic prosperity in their lives but wisdom and therefore happiness.

I will end as I started, with Hugo of St. Victor. The point Hugo was making was that a consensus was developed on things that were of high value to teach students, based on the philosophy that if students master these things they can easily find out the rest for themselves. An analogy I often use is that if you teach someone to play only "chopsticks" on the piano, they are unlikely to be able to attempt even one of the easiest Beethoven piano sonatas. However, if you teach them to play one of the easier sonatas they can easily learn how to play chopsticks in a few moments. They may also be able to progress to more challenging sonatas. And yes, you would have also introduced them to the eternal joy, peace, and wisdom of the Master.

Please, EFL university educators. We are spending too much of our time teaching our students to play chopsticks. Let us introduce them to some sonatas.

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