



Study of Humanities Key to US Economic Success

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President Obama recently called for recruiting and training 100,000 new science, math, technology and engineering teachers over the next 10 years. It seems the nation has forgotten the importance of practical writing skills such as memo writing, argument analysis and simple, well-reasoned dialogue.

English, history, government and philosophy impart skills that are critical to success in business and government, at home and in the worldwide arena. One need only look at companies such as Apple and Facebook to understand the importance of having a strong humanities education. Both are tech companies. However, what distinguished them from the start was an emphasis on creative applications of science and technology, envisioned by critical thinking and innovative analyses. Steve Jobs' amazing and persuasive speeches that were rerun after he died were not math formulas; they were verbal masterpieces.

China's educational and economic climate, as rich as it is in science and math education, has never produced a company as innovative as Apple or Facebook.

The Chinese economic boom has been driven by a workforce dedicated to doing something cheap that is already done at greater cost elsewhere. China would likely not have given the world a Facebook or an Apple because innovating, which means engaging in the generative process of creating new applications and new technologies, is not what drives science and math education there.

If we are ever going to retake our place as global education leaders, we must acknowledge that focusing only on science and math education is bad policy. We understand that in an increasingly tech-driven global economy, bolstering American students' science and math proficiency definitely increases our chance to stay competitive. However, we need the skills taught by humanities disciplines to seal the deal. Clear analysis and synthesis of information are as important to our future as science and math.

Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder and CEO of Facebook, is giving \$100 million in grants to teachers with innovative plans for education, but isn't limiting the grants to science and math teachers. Winning plans include Newark history teacher Milagro Harris, for her plan to establish an "inquiry-based social justice system," and special education teacher Janet Mino, who has created a curriculum that helps nonverbal autistic students learn communication skills with iPads.

Francis Bacon said, "Knowledge is power." Winston Churchill called for theaters in London to stay open during World War II because the fight was about preserving culture. American students will be competitive only if better science and math education is coupled with a strong foundation in the humanities.

If someone wants to change things, whether in a company or the nation, he or she must be able to cogently and succinctly grab the audience's attention and explain what is going on.

If China's present is the future we are fighting for, then by all means ignore the role of a robust education in the humanities. But this omission will not restore America's pre-eminence. America will continue to fall behind unless the humanities get their 100,000 teachers, too.

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