

八十八學年度 外國語文學系 系(所) 乙 組碩士班研究生招生考試

英文閱讀與寫作 科號 5303 共三頁第一頁 *請在試卷【答案卷】內作答

I. Read the following passage and answer the questions at the end of the passage.

Ignorance (not Stupidity) is Rampant on College Campuses

One day recently, a colleague of mine asked her undergraduate English class to name a contemporary of the medieval poet Chaucer. No one had an answer, except one student. His reply: Robert Frost. I was not amused. Perhaps I would have been if such students were the rare exceptions. But they are not. College students today, by and large, are amazingly lacking in important knowledge, and it's no laughing matter.

In my own English class, ignorance (yes, ignorance—which is *not* the same as stupidity) becomes obvious during the discussions into which our reading leads. When we talked in one class about "A Modest Proposal" by Jonathan Swift, for example, it came out that all or most of the students were unaware that Ireland had ever been governed by England. This knowledge, far from being arcane, is vital to any attempt to make sense out of the present crisis in that part of the world. In another class, when we read "Shooting an Elephant" by George Orwell, nobody had the slightest idea where Burma was.

One time, the assigned reading was a piece by historian Bruce Catton comparing Ulysses S. Grant to Robert E. Lee. The class was confused by this passage:

"America was a land that was beginning all over again, dedicated to nothing much more complicated than the rather hazy belief that all men had equal rights and should have an equal chance in the world. In such a land Lee stood for the feeling that it was somehow of advantage to human society to have a pronounced inequality in the social structure."

After some discussion, the root of the confusion became apparent: My students could not understand that in 1865, some Americans did not consider it self-evident, as Thomas Jefferson did in 1776 and as we do today, that all human beings are created equal. I tried to explain to them that this indeed was the case, and was in fact a major cause of the Civil War, but they would have none of it. They simply had never known enough history to realize that people of different centuries often live by different philosophies. They were like those Renaissance artists who painted the Madonna in 15th-century Venetian costume, innocent of the fact that people in former times had not always lived and thought exactly as they did.

Now, if I were dealing with simpletons, none of this would bother me profoundly. But my students are not simple-minded. Most get good marks in their major subjects, and many intend careers in medicine, engineering, law. Far from being "slow," they were intelligent, and on their way to becoming the "leaders of tomorrow." But they do not have the knowledge that a college student, let alone a leader, ought to have. Their minds are capable of understanding concepts and facts, but many concepts and facts that I consider vital to their becoming well-informed, responsible citizens have never been presented to them. They know their trigonometry and calculus, but they have never heard of Thoreau, and many aren't sure who came first, Lincoln or Washington. They score better than I ever could on a chemistry test, but return blank stares when I ask which countries the United States fought in World War I.

Why does this problem exist? Mainly because the primary and secondary schools have never done their jobs. We read nowadays about plunging reading levels and college-board scores, about people suing their high schools for failing to cure them of

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illiteracy; a while back, in a cover story, *Time* magazine examined teachers who are themselves too ignorant to teach, a problem that is becoming more and more manifest in the nation's schools. The problem is endemic to private schools as well as public, and is not confined to schools in impoverished communities. Indeed, most of the undereducated minds in my classes come from Long Island, one of the most affluent areas in the nation.

Placing the blame, unfortunately, doesn't remove the problem. And it is a problem, which makes teaching noticeably more difficult. Because my students are critically unaware of vital areas of knowledge, there are only two things I can discuss with them as a group, two areas to which I can turn for analogies and illustrations when trying to make a point in the classroom: rock music and TV.

When taking a test for a scholarship in high school, I wondered why there were questions probing my knowledge of art, music, literature, geography, history. It wasn't until I became a teacher that I learned why general knowledge was so important. The fact is simply that a student with a wide range of knowledge learns better. He does this not because he is brighter than someone without his range of knowledge, but because he has a context into which he can easily fit any new learning he acquires. The student who knows enough history to have some idea of the way people lived and thought at the time of the Civil War will have no trouble understanding and learning from Bruce Catton's remarks about Grant and Lee. A student who does not know anything about Civil War except that it had something to do with slavery will be terribly confused by the same essay.

How can this problem of ignorance be solved? By starting at the source. As I have said, the roots of the problem lie much earlier than college—they lie in the first 10 to 15 years of a child's life, while his tastes and interests are being formed. It is up to the individual parent to influence these tastes and interests as positively as possible. For example, buy the kid a few books instead of video game. Put a globe in his room and look at it with him every now and then. Take him to a symphony concert so that he will be able to appreciate Mozart as well as Meatloaf when he grows up (and recognize the name). Walk him through the local museum on a Saturday afternoon. Keep an atlas, a dictionary, a history book, and a set of encyclopedias around the house, and make conspicuous use of them. Ration the TV. A little imagination on the part of a parent can go a long way toward helping a child learn: after pointing out Seurat's dots and Van Gogh's globs, for example, make a game of who-painted-this.

It is not the most systematic method of education, but it is, at present, the only way to keep the most advanced civilization on earth from producing the most inexcusable ignorant generation of college graduates in its history.

Answer the following questions in your own words:

1. The author describes in this passage a phenomenon in American colleges. Do you find similar phenomena in colleges and universities in Taiwan? Please comment with about 50 words. 15%
2. What does the word "pronounced" in Line 19 mean? 5%
3. In Line 25, the author says, "they would have none of it". What does this expression refer to in this context? 10%
4. In Line 30, the author says, "if I were dealing with simpletons, none of this would

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- bother me profoundly". Why does he say so? Is the author prejudiced? 10%
5. Why does the author think general knowledge is important to college students? Do you agree? Why or why not? 10%
6. Do you think the trend of education in Taiwan, after the "education reform", is moving towards or away from the problem discussed in this passage? 10%

II. Translate the following passage into Chinese. 20%

Surveys reveal that most adults consider themselves "well informed about the affairs of the nation and the world." Yet a regularly taken Roper poll that asks, "From where do you obtain most of your information about the world?" has found the percentage of people who reply, "Television" has been increasing steadily over the past decade. The latest questionnaire found that well over 60 percent of the respondents chose television over other media as their major source of information. These two facts are difficult to reconcile since even a casual study of television news reveals it is only a headline service and not a source of information enabling one to shape a world view.

III. Translate the following passage into English. 20%

愛因斯坦 (Albert Einstein) 曾經將某位有名科學家的創造力歸功於他「從未上過學，因此保存了自由思考的罕見能力」。愛因斯坦的觀察無疑是有道理的。許多藝術家及天才似乎也都將他們受的學校教育視為一種不利。可是這個道理不是對學校教育的批評。學校的功能是要促進文明，而不是要訓練拓荒者。拓荒者永遠是孤獨的，不管他是藝術，音樂，科學還是科技的先趨。有創意的拓荒者具有如詹姆士 (William James) 所謂的「以非常的方式去體察的能力」。只要學校教導體察的型態，就會導致破壞創造力及天才。可是如果學校只是為發掘天才而存在，這個社會就會解體。因為社會秩序要求的是一致性及普遍的共識，這兩種特性都是對創造力有破壞性的。在社會的要求與創造力及天才火花之間永遠有衝突存在。