21st Century Skills –
Discussion about the mindset and skills of Chinese students

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In the 21st century, it appears that a substantial number of Chinese students are facing tremendous stress in the midst of rapid technological advancement. For example, I am currently a college student in China and had just completed my Level 4 English examination in the morning before I wrote this essay. Anyhow, having obtained Level 4 in the English examination is no longer a requirement for college graduates, but it is often regarded as one of the necessary requirements for job hunters. In my opinion, language is an ability of verbal communication instead of merely for the examination purpose. It is not enough that one can write and translate the language but not speak.

A majority of Chinese students should have experienced the hardship of college entrance examination. I believe many would never forget how hard they studied during that period. Every day, everyone spent hours doing revisions and working on problem sets in classrooms without creativity and innovation. In the fast changing 21st century, should this be enough for Chinese students to cope with all the changes in the world? The skill that Chinese students really need is the innovative mindset. Innovation does not mean that students need to invent or discover new things, but it refers to thinking in various perspectives. For instance, it can be regarded as innovation when one uses a method different from the one that is taught by the teacher in solving a mathematical problem. Isn’t this easier and more innovative than solving a problem by repeatedly using the same method taught by the teacher?

In addition, one has to have a genuine sense of right and wrong and social responsibility. In China, at present whether one should take care of the elderly has surprisingly become a social issue for debate. This debate may give a misleading message to the children in China and may influence their sense of
social responsibility. In the 21st century, technology advances and changes, so do human beings. The differences between right and wrong have become less clear. Many may hold the view that it is right to take action as long as one’s benefit is satisfied. Some may even “call white black” (distort the truth) in order to strive for money and power. These all have negative implications to the children. As such, in the era of transformation, it is an important skill to distinguish right from wrong and to have a sense of responsibility.

Currently, most of the families in China have only a single child. These children are usually self-centered without bothering to helping one another and without being considerate, resulting in having problems in human relationships. Collaboration is an important skill in the 21st century. Human beings are social animals, how can they achieve success without collaboration with others? Even the smallest part of a machine has to be produced through collaboration with other people. Hence, it is particularly essential to have good team spirit and to maintain good relationship with others.

There is an old Chinese saying “(literally meaning) possessing knowledge of a special skill”, which shows the importance of acquiring specialized knowledge and skills. Chinese students in general take part in a substantial number of academic courses; however, they may not be familiar with any particular discipline of knowledge. Nowadays, it appears that they have a broad and basic understanding of various disciplines but without going into detail in any of them. In fact, this not only wastes the time of the students but also becomes an obstacle to the development of specialists. I think it is advisable to specialize in a single discipline after grasping understanding of basic knowledge of various disciplines.

The development and widespread use of smartphones and personal computers lead to more and more frequent use of Internet. When writing thesis, one does not need to go to the library but conduct an Internet search. When keeping abreast of current affairs, one does not need to read newspapers but read the headlines on news webpages. In the new era of technology, not being able to use computer programs is regarded as one of the determining factors for illiteracy. These illustrate that it is a prerequisite skill
to know the basic operation of computers and to use software programs. Only if one keeps abreast of the world news can he/she keep pace with the changing world and broaden one’s horizons without lagging behind.

Looking at the recent news about social issues in China, one would notice that there are a number of violent incidents in which the people concerned perform harmful acts to others due to some trivial arguments. The cause of these tragedies appears to be the lack of self-control. It seems that in the 21st century, while people tend to have great drive and enthusiasm, in various occasions they may have weak self-control. Self-control, from my point of view, is not only necessary in human relationships and at work but also in the process of learning, not to mention in the every moment of one’s life. There are a number of temptations in the 21st century. Self-control allows us to enjoy life without being depraved.

In China, many children are busy learning different types of knowledge as their parents believe that their children should not “lose at the starting point”. In my opinion, one’s leadership ability can be reflected from his/her organizational skills and problem-solving ability. Only those who have leadership ability can make people convinced. As such, it is a prerequisite in the 21st century to acquire leadership ability, which is a type of social and organizational skills.

In the 21st century of China, there are lots of skills that one has to acquire. For instance, at college, every day I study hard with a view to obtaining qualifications for a better future. Perhaps many would think that qualifications/certifications are the best proxies to prove one’s ability. However, my opinion is that as long as one can make the correct use of skills, it does not matter whether he/she has acquired qualifications/certifications. In any case, practice is the only way to show one’s actual ability.

Reference: Baidu “21st century skills”