

The Theory of a Liberal Education

A liberal education may be defined as that which gives man a free and cultivated mind, the power to choose the subjects of his pursuits in order to promote the highest freedom, to perfect the human understanding, and to purify and elevate the soul.

A liberal education is not properly a technical education. While a technical education is a specialization on some one branch of study, a liberal education is elective and includes more, and even all phases of knowledge. A liberal education is dependent upon the intellectual power of concentration, distribution, retention, expression, and judgment. Or in other words, a man must have the power to lay emphasis where it belongs—the power of wisdom.

A truly liberal education includes as its essentials, a vigorous, thorough pursuit of at least five subjects: language, literature, mathematics, natural science, and philosophy. Under these five divisions may be included nearly all branches of knowledge, essential to a liberal education. We may narrow this still farther into three groups, (1) language and literature, (2) mathematics and natural science, (3) and philosophy or the product of reflective thinking. Any education which is defective in any of these three falls short of being liberal.

We may say that language is the pass-key to literature. It is the only way to unlock the treasures of literature. By the study of language in regard to a liberal education is not meant a prolonged and scholastic study of many languages, but the power to acquire the art of interpretation and expression of thoughts of another people or race. Language is the inner temple of literature, for we must know how to get at the meaning of any literature. The ancient classical languages, Greek and Latin, are the best means of acquiring the art of