

TALKING POINTS

Dr. Boyer's Remarks to the National Conference on Career Development at Doane College, Crete, Nebraska

May 31, 1979

It is an honor and a privilege to deliver the Ralph Tyler address at this conference, especially since Doane is one of a comparatively few liberal arts colleges that have intensively, conscientiously, and successfully incorporated career education into their curriculum.

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It is especially heartening to see a liberal arts college involved in the advancement of career development. Doane is outstanding as a pioneer in demonstrating the compatibility of academic and practical education. The meshing of the two kinds of skills and attitudes that Doane has accomplished serves as a splendid model for other liberal arts colleges throughout the country.

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The talk we hear these days about "liberal versus vocational education" is just that ... talk. No work is demeaning if it satisfies a personal goal -- and a student does not lower his values by studying with a career in mind. Education has always been a blend of preparation for the life of the mind and the life of a contributing citizen.

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The choice of vocation is of prime importance in shaping our values and determining the quality of our lives.

But that choice need not be in the intellectual stratosphere. Our snobbery and need for prestige is often so great that we make distorted choices based upon unrealistic goals. For instance:

...it's alright, some say, to prepare to be a doctor, but its less alright to be a nurse.

...it's alright to be an engineer, but a computer programmer is off limits.

...teaching college is fine, but teaching elementary school is too banal.

...to dig the ruins of the past is distinguished work, but to work with ruined lives in an urban jungle -- while much more demanding -- is less distinguished.

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I'm sure you are aware that up through the year 1985 there will be 13.1 million college graduates competing for the 12.1 million jobs requiring a college education. That's what the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts. A great many young people will take these statistics as a sign that they should bypass a liberal arts education and head straight for the nearest vocational skills center. That would be very sad for the culture of this country as well as for the young people themselves.

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The liberal arts -- indirectly but nevertheless effectively -- help with vocational skills ... the skills to think logically, creatively, and analytically. These skills usually pay off more handsomely at the upper career echelons than at the entry levels.

In fact, they often appear to be a liability to many young jobseekers, since the ability to think may be unimportant in the first jobs that college graduates are able to find today.

Nevertheless, armed with a specific vocational skill for entry, liberal arts students are likely to advance more quickly in the world of work. And they earn a bonus that cannot be expressed in terms of dollars. Their liberal arts background will help them achieve a more satisfying lifestyle and make joyful creative use of leisure time.

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There must be close interchange and cooperation between the occupations and professions and higher education all along the line in order to develop new education formulas in a world in which people will seek new re-entry jobs many times during their lives.