

TALKING POINTS

Dr. Boyer's remarks at seminar on "Educating for Values"
during visit of Israeli Minister of Education --
Commissioner's Conference Room
June 12, 1979

- ° From the beginning of public education in America through the first third of this century, we unabashedly attached the teaching of values and moral behavior to the vehicle of subject matter.
- ° In fact, until relatively recent times, we adhered to a premise stated by Herbert Spencer in 1851, that "Education has for its object the formation of character." (Social Statics)

- ° A study released in April by the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education found that students are committed to developing ethical values in college.
- ° Yet, the researchers found that many college students cheat on tests, abuse financial aid, and steal and vandalize college property.
- ° In 1967, 5.4 percent of college students said they had cheated. Ten years later, 9.8 percent made that admission.
- ° The study found that some faculty members inflate grades and some higher education institutions use misleading advertising to attract students to fill up their classrooms.

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- Nevertheless, Carnegie Council Chairman Clark Kerr concludes that the moral conduct of higher education is quite above that of society as a whole.

- We must be cautious in identifying what we would call "reasons" for the moral state of society.
- Some would say that, in the wake of Watergate, the public has lost its trust in the integrity of officials at all levels of government.
- There is increased distrust of big business. As the Ralph Naders of the world have shown us time and time again, big business often lies to us.
- We see doctors who get rich by cheating on Medicaid; we see successful professionals renege on the student loans that helped them reach success; we see drivers cheat on speed limits; we see evidence that there really is a little larceny in the hearts of far too many of us.
- These are not reasons, or causes, or excuses. They are symptoms of a prevailing attitude that "to beat the system is the name of the game."

- The Carnegie study does not delve into the ethical behavior of elementary and secondary school children. Yet, perhaps because the moral fiber of society appears to have weakened,

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the public in general and parents in particular are greatly concerned about evidence of unethical behavior among youth and they look to our schools for corrective measures.

- However, despite overt expressions of concern by parents and the public, the New York Times, in a discussion of the Carnegie study, asks a valid and frightening question: "Why does society expect students to uphold values any nobler than those of the families that rear them, the institutions that train them, and the businesses that hire them?"
- We are hard pressed to answer that question. Still, we cannot abdicate the responsibility to instill a sense of morality in our children. If parents and the larger society cannot do it, the schools must try.

- Our education institutions at all levels should, without apology, teach the virtues and values of our democratic system. Moral values, a code of conduct, and ethical standards are clearly implied in the Bill of Rights and in the entire structure of our system. There is no need to be neutral about them.
- Our schools should teach equality of opportunity, fairness, honesty, and respect for the law.

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- ° They should provide an atmosphere that will free our children from prejudice by helping them to understand and recognize the values of other cultures; to recognize the interdependence of peoples throughout the world and the necessity for sharing equitably the resources of the planet Earth.
- ° Basically, we must instill in our children a commitment to right behavior.
- ° By doing so, we can promise our children's children a social heritage that many have questioned in recent years and that some have even discarded. I am confident that the coming generation will come to value what we have called in recent years "old-fashioned virtues." This heritage has to do with the validity of marriage, family ties, and lasting friendships, along with religious experience and civic responsibility and other social relationships that have made life more livable for most of us.

- ° One thing our schools must stress is the worth of the individual.
- ° In our computerized world, we have been reduced to numbers. We have lost our personal identity and with it our impulse to be accountable for our actions.

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- The schools must emphasize that each person is accountable for the way he lives his life, for his private and public actions.
- The person who is aware of his unique worth is much more likely to act responsibly. The individual who takes pride in being is one of conscience; one who is not going to cheat even when the pressure to do so is very great.
- We cannot undo the unethical behaviors of the past, but we can insist upon ethical behavior now and in the future from our elected officials, from business, from education institutions, and from people who touch our daily lives.
- I am convinced that example is the best teacher -- that children who observe morality in the world around them will, without conscious design, act accordingly.

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