

THE SHAPING OF AN EDUCATED HEART

Address  
by  
Ernest L. Boyer  
President, The Carnegie Foundation  
for the Advancement of Teaching

Conference on Values  
Maryland State Department of Education  
Columbia, Maryland  
January 29, 1982

During a lecture at Downstate Medical Center in 1966, Arnold Toynbee said that we have "conquered nature" and now our great unfinished task is to "conquer self." "Man," he said, "is our most formidable enemy. He is more formidable than wild beasts (man's earliest foe) and more formidable than disease, which for the most part we now control."

"The time has come," Toynbee said, "for mankind as a whole to unite against "the enemy" in itself."

Toynbee noted in conclusion that "the greatest irony of our time is that man may be destroyed, not by his madness but by his carelessness, by his "wanton disregard" for himself and for his special relationship to the planet Earth.

Toynbee's warning hang over us like a chilling cloud, in addition to the rape of physical resources he warned of the "crisis of the human spirit." some new wiser species will replace us.

Today there is spread across the land, a vast uneasiness one can almost feel and touch. It's like a kind of "prickly ball" in the pits of our stomachs telling us something is not right.

And the daily news makes us alternately "angry and depressed."

-2-

More than fifty years ago, Josiah Royce described the conditions of his time in terms that are shockingly prophetic of our day as well.

- o Royce said of an earlier day that we have become "more knowing, more clever, more skeptical, but seemingly we do not become more profound or more reverent."

Today--here in Columbia--we begin an "unusual conversation." We have left our schools and our offices to talk about "the place of values" in education--a topic that is so painfully difficult, precisely because it is so urgent.

I'm troubled that my own remarks will sound to shallow, even sentimental. And yet I am constrained to say that those of us in education--must--somehow confront more systematically than we do, the ethical and moral crisis of our time and consider ways to strengthen such old-fashioned virtues as truth--and justice--and integrity--and human decency. But just how can our schools instill these conditions which our grandparents would have called the qualities of the human spirit? Its easier said than done.

Let me suggest three steps that might focus on qualities of their human spirit and help strengthen the "moral fiber" in our nation's life.

## I.

First, I suggest the time has come for us in the curriculum to underscore the "unity of life" on this spaceship Earth. Some years ago William Arrowsmith declared that education is:

- o "unconsciously helping to create a new and special modern chaos, in which the environment as a whole is nobody's business and bears nobody's design--"a conglomerate" whose total disorder is exposed by the ruthless unrelatedness of the parts."

There is some truth to this charge. For, with all of our academic subtleties and our countless categories of knowledge, we frequently introduce students to all questions except those that matter most. And while our schools and colleges do quite well in transmitting bits of information, there is another obligation that is substantially ignored--we often fail to help students search out the "interlocking threads" of human knowledge.

The fact is that students come to school at a time in their lives when the biggest questions press in and yet rarely in the academic programs are these "transcendent issues" met head on. And this leads, to frustration and to the conclusion that schools are irrelevant to their deepest needs.

- o Somerset Maugham in the "writer's notebook" tells poignantly of the mountaineer who struggled to reach the top of the highest peak only to discover that instead of seeing the sunrise he found "only fog," where upon the writer says "he wandered down again."

It was Tolstoi who, as a young man, identified the transcendent issues that bother him, and the list seems relevant yet today. Tolstoi troubled himself with such questions as:

- o "Why live at all?"
- o What is the cause of my existence and of everyone else's?"
- o "What is the meaning of the cleavage into good and evil which I feel within myself, and why does this cleavage exist?"
- o "What should be the plan of my life?"
- o "What is death, how can I transcend it?"

These are heavy questions--faced best perhaps in the home and church. But is it also appropriate to ask, how --in school-- students can explore the large human issues that "cut across all specialities"--as Walter Lippman says?

This sort of layer wisdom Lippmann says:

- o "... can be possessed by anyone who has an imaginative feeling for what really matters to human beings, whether they travel in jet plans or walk on foot--whether they are craftsmen in little workshops or hired hands in an automatic factory run by a computer."

The point is clear enough. We must, through -general education- help students understand that they are not only out autonomous individuals but also members of a larger community to which they are accountable. Such inquiry put our own lives in perspective - and allows us discover in a most fundamental sense-who we are.

At a recent meeting of the (American Association for the Advancement of Science), Dr. Lewis Thomas, obstrued that "these are not the best of times for the human mind," and went on to say that:

- o "I cannot begin to guess at all of the causes of our cultural sadness, not even the most important ones, but I can think of one thing that is wrong with us, and eats away at us: we do not know enough about ourselves. We are ignorant about how we work, about where we fit in, and most of all about the enormous, imponderable system of life, in which we are embedded as working parts."

The curriculum should help provide this layer vision.

-6-

## II.

Next I turn to "climate," in our search for greater meaning, I suggest that schools in their day-to-day procedures underscore the point that people are important.

This statement is so simple, it borders on the sentimental. Yet in our busy world of increased emphasis on technology, -with pressures and problems on every side, of almost hourly crises, one of our most difficult tasks still remains--that of dealing humanely with one another.

Surrounded, sometimes even mastered, by our inventions, it becomes all too easy to put people into categories. We tend to speak of "engineers," "professors," "bus drivers," the "middle class," the "silent majority," and on and on we go.

And as we pigeonhole, we distort And the schools become less humane. We lose sight of the fact that we are engaged with "people"--individuals who laugh, who love, who have unique talents and deep aspirations, who grow old and lonely, who have fears and doubts in the dark of night. We live out "Eleanor Rigby"--popularized in the Beatles' tune. Eleanor, as you'll recall, waited at the window "wearing the mask she keeps in a jar by the door." We, too, wear our masks, acting out our roles as two-dimensional people, wearing a "face" we keep in a jar by the door.

-7-

Some months ago I tried to recall all of the teachers I had had. Several dozen came to mind. I then tried to focus on the great teachers and I remembered three or four--and oh, I thought Miss Rice and Mr. Wittlinger and Professor Tade, it seemed clear that what made them great was, not their mastery of the discipline--although they were all scholarly and well informed. These teachers were outstanding because they were "truly human," revealing not only the facts but feelings. They dicussed, not only what they knew but what they did not know, as well.

The point is this. If values are to be taught they must be lived and this means a climate of candor and integrity and honesty in both the adminstrative and the pedagogial function of the schools.

- o Indeed it is here--at this very point--that our rebirth must begin.

The school must be a place where integrity is demonstrated every day-in the assignments given-in the standards we maintain, in the respect extended-and in the performance we expect of every student.



## III.

My third suggestion deals with process—a goal that seems even more elusive. In exploring values in education we must be more than models. Students themselves must be encouraged to weigh alternatives to make responsible judgements, to form convictions, and to act boldly upon the values that they hold.

- o It is not enough merely to have a good curriculum in which students see the world as a whole.
- o It is not enough to have a climate where integrity is valued.
- o We also must have classroom experiences where students can develop and refine the capacity to achieve "what is good and what is best."

I understand that when a discussion finally turns to "teaching values" we clutch up a bit. A strange embarrassment seems to overtake us all. The topic seems at once both threatening and out-of-date.

And yet we cannot suggest to students that they can be responsible people, without ever taking sides, or without expressing firm convictions about fundamental issues-is-of course-a frightening delusion.

In his penetrating book, Faith and Learning, Alexander Miller commented rightly on this curious timidity whe he wrote:

"A decent tentativeness is a wholesome expression of scholarly humility. We seem to have a sort of "dogmatic tentativeness" which suggest that (in matters of moral judgment, at least) it is intellectually indecent to make up your minds."

But I believe there is a hopeful side to all of this.

- o We now realize that, as George Steiner has reminded us that a man who is intellectually advance can at the same time be morally bankrupt.
- o We now know that such a man can listen to Bach and Schubert at sundown, he can read Goether in the evening, and the next day go to his daily work at the concentration camp to gas his fellowmen.

-10-

- o "What grows up inside literate civilization," Steiner asks,  
"that seems to prepare it for the release of barbarism?"

To put it very simply, we are beginning to understand that education does not inevitably humanize.

We are losing faith in the childish notion that all education, regardless of its quality or thrust or purpose, will lead to virtue.

-11-

## IV

All of this is well and good. But just how do we proceed? Exactly whose values does the school expouse? And how should they be taught?

Without begging the question, I conclude that what we need is our attitude that developing life values is absolutely crucial and--a place where the climate does not push for particular conclusions, but makes honorable the quest.

This is not to suggest a program of indoctrination that suffocated the spirit, neither does it mean theory courses that become only speculative and remote. Indeed, the process I have just described can take place not necessarily in a special course called "value" but in a study of MacBeth, or Plato's Apology or John Osbornes play Luther or Thomas Paines, The Crisis or Thoreau's Civil Disobedience or The Rebel by Comus.

Students might examine the ethical implications in public policy decisions. Consider for example the decision of President Andrew Jackson to remove the native american population from Georgia and the other southern states. How was the decision made? What social forces shaped it?

-12-

Several weeks ago I saw values being taught in a junior high school in New Haven and the students discussed Oliver Twist. I repeat the shaping of values is a process that teaches all along the line.

Richard Hunt of Harvard--in an article in the New York Times described at length a disturbing encounter he had with his students' over what he called the "no fault" view of history.

The experience came out of a course about Nazi Germany.

Though the students were not indifferent to oppression many seemed to hold "a desparingly deterministic" view of the present and the past.

These things just happen, Hunt said:

"...I believe now my course became for some students a kind of projection screen for their own moral struggles and dilemmas." In his view the reaction was part of the trend toward is a "no-fault" guilt-free society."

-13-

Hunt concludes:

"Next time I would love to convey the meaning of moral decisions. More important, I want to point out that single sets of individuals and strong stands of institutions-make a difference. I'm through teaching "no fault history."

The point is this: when all is said and done, we must have schools and classrooms "committed" to developing within each student the capacity to judge wisely in matters of life and conduct.

- o In no way do these imperatives replace the need for rigorous study in the disciplines.

But neither must this need destroy the human yearning for education that leads to a reverence for life and capacity to live a wise, productive life.

-14-

V.

If done well we can achieve in education what, on another occasion, I called the educated heart.

The educated heart means,

- o a tolerance of others, a reaching for mastery without arrogance, a courtesy toward opposing views, a dedication to fairness and social justice,

an adherence to integrity and precision in thought and speech, and a love for graceful expression and audacious intellect.

These may be loft ideals but they are still, I am convinced, within our grasp as we

- o as we shape a curriculum that reflects the interdependent of our world.
- o as we create a climate where relationships are affirmed
- o and as we encourage a process in which issues of Carnegie are carefully examined and the implications of value choice are thoughtfully explored.