

"TRUTH IN EDUCATION"

Speech Delivered by

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When the College Board was founded 80 years ago, the passage from prep school to college in this Nation was chaotic. Wilson Farrand, the headmaster of Newark Academy, was "startlingly gentle" in his criticism when he complained about "the unreasonable diversity" of the college admission test. Outrageous might have been a better word.

Nicholas Murray Butler, one of the giants in the field, was a bit more biting when he said that the colleges could agree "neither upon subjects to be offered for admission nor upon topics within these subjects. Each institution," he declared, "plays its own hand and consults first what it rightly or wrongly feels to be its 'peculiar interests'; and then, if time and opportunity are available, the college casts 'a sympathetic glance' towards the interests of education overall."

For the preparatory schools this situation was both ludicrous and tragic. Again, Nicholas Murray Butler paints a vivid picture: "If reading Cicero was required for admission by these colleges, it meant reading four orations in one place and in another six, and not always the same four or the same six."

Dr. Cecil F.P. Bancroft, principal of Phillips Academy in Andover, complained bitterly in 1885 that "in out of over forty boys preparing for college next year at Andover we have more than twenty senior classes getting students ready for twenty separate colleges."

Clearly, the time had come to bring order out of chaos. Led by the vision of Charles William Eliot of Harvard and Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia, the College Board was born. For the first time in our Nation's history, America's higher learning institutions surrendered their prerogatives. And for the first time, a bridge between the high school and the college had been built. This "voluntary" formation of the College Board was an act of great statesmanship and vision, and I am confident that if this structure were abolished, there would soon be an urgent cry to recreate the Board.

I have reviewed the history of this distinguished institution to make one essential point. Today, eight decades after the College Board began, we confront another testing crisis. This time we face a "crisis in confidence," which I believe threatens to undermine the enormous gains we've made. And I'm convinced the time has come to face the problem squarely and to reaffirm some very fundamental goals which shaped this

institution 80 years ago.

First, it's time to reaffirm that testing does have an important role to play in education. At a recent NIE-sponsored Testing Conference, Ralph Tyler said that the assessment of educational achievement has been practiced for several thousand years, despite a change in the labels we have used to describe this assessment. Whether we talk about examining, testing, measuring, evaluating, appraising, or now assessing, in the end the goal remains the same: to measure educational progress and to assist students in their personal and academic growth. It's absolutely true, of course, that testing has its limits, and it's also true that testing may sometimes be abused, but this does not justify thoughtless condemnation.

Specifically, I reject the view that measurement and evaluation have become an evil. And I especially reject the view that we need an act of Congress to tamper with the testing process in this country. Government regulation has an important role to play, but when it comes to education, government must be "the court of last resort." And I am certain that we have not yet reached this point.

When this country faced a testing crisis 80 years ago, leaders from the Nation's most distinguished colleges and schools came together to work out a solution on their own. The suggestion that a "committee of a Congress" had the answer was unthinkable to them, and I believe it should be unacceptable today.

Of course, the content and the administration of standardized examinations must continuously be improved. But I am convinced that these changes can be achieved without intru-

sive legislation.

And this leads me to my second proposition: To improve the testing process, we must have more collaboration between the Nation's colleges and schools. In his last report to the College Board, Nicholas Murray Butler described how, in 1900, school and college people came together to solve a common problem: "It is not only wise but important and highly desirable that representatives of the secondary schools should confer with representatives of the colleges."

This is the spirit which gave the College Board its special inspiration, and from that small beginning we now have an organization of 2,500 members from the Nation's schools and colleges. But this spirit of cooperation must expand to other places as well.

Recently I completed a two-and-a-half year term as United States Commissioner of Education. During that exciting and rewarding tenure, I worked with colleges and schools, I visited classrooms all across the country, and I talked to teachers and administrators at every academic level. Frankly, I was dismayed by our fragmented structure. I was dismayed that colleges could look condescendingly at schools and never offer help or ask for help themselves. And I was dismayed that their only answer to falling scores was to "jack up" their own admission standards.

Today, 50 percent of all high school students in New York City will leave school before they graduate. This should be cause for great concern not only within the schools but within the colleges as well. There is, of course, the tragedy of

human waste in this terrible statistic. But when 50 percent of all high school students "drop out," this also means an "enrollment drop" for higher education. And for reasons of their own survival, to say nothing of the survival of this Nation, colleges should be eager to work with schools to improve their academic standards.

This organization--the College Entrance Examination Board--is one of the few institutions in the United States where school and college leaders come together. And this collaboration must increase. Specifically, I propose that a national panel of distinguished educators and concerned citizens be convened--similar perhaps to the Committee of Ten that organized itself to form the College Board. The goal would be to look not only at our testing methods but at the relationship between testing and something we call "standards." A mandate which, incidentally, is in the Charter of this institution.

Which brings me to proposition number three: I believe the time has come to link the so-called standardized testing in this country more closely to the education process. When the College Board began, high school and college teachers came together to talk, not just about testing but about education as well. After much debate these teachers agreed upon a core curriculum in which all students would be tested. The nine key subjects were: English, history, chemistry, French, German, Greek, Latin, mathematics, and physics.

Dr. Claude M. Fuess, in his well-written history of the College Board, noted that: "These teachers also spent hours going over the questions in each subject making sure they

genuinely measured proficiency and sound academic teaching." In those days, education and evaluation were clearly and inextricably interlocked. In fact, these teachers accepted the old-fashioned view that there was a course of study which every educated person should complete. Today, there is no clear-cut connection between our classrooms and our tests, and we go to enormous lengths to make sure tests are not directly linked to the curriculum and to teaching.

The so-called "high school competency tests" illustrate my point. Many states, in a desperate move to recapture quality, now require high school students to take an "exit test"; not to measure the curriculum but to see if students can cope in our complicated world. And yet, it's a curious fact that many of the skills these tests purport to measure--such as filling out a check or an application form--may be not at all related to what we teach in school.

It's also a curious fact that we somehow feel more comfortable tinkering with tests and measuring something we call "minimal competency" than we do in talking about the goals and content of our education and in confronting the question of quality head on. Indeed, as our purposes become more and more unclear, our testing methods seem to become more and more precise. But there is also a mismatch between education and evaluation at the college level as well.

In recent years we have focused increasingly on something we call "aptitude," not on the content of the academic program or on the achievement of our students. And we claim that our admission tests are largely "classroom" and teacher free, and are not influenced by outside coaching. Frankly, I feel we

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should be cautious in these claims. Now I recognize that some distance between the tests and schools is absolutely crucial. We do have a great range of high schools in this Nation, and we have a great diversity of students. Nevertheless, the predictive value of the examinations has been remarkably consistent. But I also believe that education and evaluation cannot and should not be totally divorced. To do so sparks great tension between those who test and those who teach. And I believe public confidence will continue to go down if the testing institutions and the schools try to run on wholly separate tracks.

Let me state the issue as clearly as I can. I believe that much of the current frustrations about the quality of testing is a misplaced frustration about the quality of our schools. And it reflects a deeply felt conviction that somehow these two enterprises must be more closely joined.

I'll give you three examples to illustrate what I mean. Last year I suggested--in the New York Times--that our school system should be restructured beginning with what I called the "basic school." I proposed that this four-year institution focus on the fundamentals, especially the mastery of language. After all, the effective use of symbols is the exquisite human skill that separates us from all other forms of life. The mastery of this process is essential to all future education and it cannot be endlessly postponed.

And after serving as Commissioner, I'm convinced that we need better ways to measure language progress in the early grades, and new instruments to link the written and oral development of language. In fact, our language testing today is about as chaotic as college admission testing was 80 years ago.

I also proposed a "middle school" to replace the so-called junior high. This would be a four- to five-year institution in which a new kind of "core curriculum" would be taught. Indeed, I believe the search for a new common core of subjects is a point where college and school interests clearly intersect.

During both the junior high school years and the first two years in college, we say we introduce students to "general education." And yet, at both of these important levels the so-called core curriculum is highly disordered. Why not bring both junior high and college teachers together to search for a new kind of common core? Why not have teachers at these levels attempt to build a two-part general education sequence--introductory and advanced--with one level related to another. Such a curriculum could focus on our common heritage--the common experiences we share today--and introduce students to our common options of the future. And why not work in new ways to help teachers measure academic progress.

Finally, in my article I proposed a "transition school"--a three-year institution--to replace the high school, which is largely a failing institution. In the transition school, with many smaller "cluster units," the so-called comprehensive high school would be broken down into sections. Students would continue their study of the basics of general education, but each student would also begin to specialize following his or her own aptitudes and interests. There would be, for example, cluster schools in the arts, in health sciences, in computer technology, in mathematics, in community services--just to name a few.

Some students would have part-time apprenticeships and

others would go to college early. For this school to function effectively, we would have to know much more about the individual student. Much guidance and evaluation would be needed in order to place students in the appropriate program in this transition school.

And this brings me to my fourth proposition: In the days ahead tests must increasingly be used for guidance and for placement and not for sorting only. When the College Board began in 1900, the goal was clearly stated in Butler's words: "The sole purpose of the test was to determine whether the pupil is ready to go forward with advantage from one institution to another." Today, we reject this narrow view of testing. We are now convinced that all students--not just the privileged few--must "go forward with advantage." And our job must be to help students of all ages chose the most appropriate path to take.

Today we are, quite literally, a nation of learning. We have all sorts of colleges to serve all sorts of students. And, increasingly, adults in every walk of life must go back to school to stay in touch with changes in their fields.

Given these conditions, it is ludicrous to suggest that our only job is "sorting people out." Our job in the future must be to help students learn more about themselves. And we have the instruments to do the job. (Visit Brockport's Computer Program ETS and Stanford's Academic Information Center.)

One final point. In the days ahead we must also find new ways to identify and assess our most creative students. The truth is that for many years our tests have measured recall and problem solving and the use of words and numbers, and these have been

most useful. But we have been less successful in measuring imagination and in identifying the creative and artistic student. It is a disturbing circumstance that in recent years the inventiveness of this Nation has been going down. Between 1966 and 1975 the U.S. patent balance decreased with respect to the United Kingdom, Canada, West Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union. The proportion of the world's major technological innovations produced by the U.S. decreased from 80 percent in 1956, to 59 percent in 1971. Between 1960 and 1976 the U.S. moved from first to last in productivity gains in manufacturing when compared to France, West Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom and Canada.

I am convinced that our success--and even our survival--hinges on our capacity to manage an increasingly complicated world. And, frankly, I worry that we are becoming more ignorant about our own inventions. Take Three Mile Island, for example. Not many months ago millions of Americans sat glued to their TV sets listening to strange talk about "rems," and "cooling systems," and "cold shut downs," and for all the world it sounded like a foreign language. In fact, for most of us it was a foreign language, and if Three Mile Island taught us anything at all, it taught us how ignorant we are.

And without more education and more creativity we all will become increasingly more ignorant--not just about nuclear power but about energy and economics and SALT II and a whole host of very vital issues. Indeed, a new kind of "priesthood" is beginning to emerge. Specialists who control the information to their own special ends, and tell the rest of us--who are functionally illiterate--only what they want us to know.

My point is this: In the days ahead we must develop new ways to identify and stimulate creativity, not conformity, and challenge the imagination of our most gifted students who come from every neighborhood and every economic level.

Vachel Lindsey once wrote that:

"It is the world's one crime its babes grow
dull,
Not that they serve
--but that they have no God to serve,
Not that they sow
--but that they seldom reap,
Not that they die
--but that they die like sheep."

The crime of life is talent unfulfilled.

On final word. We hear a lot of talk these days about "truth in testing." Frankly, this slogan may divert us from the most essential issue. Quality should be our real concern, and I'm convinced that "truth in education," not just truth in testing, should be our new crusade.

The time has come for teachers and administrators from our schools and colleges to come together to clarify our academic goals to relate evaluation more closely to classroom and the teacher; to test increasingly for guidance, not for sorting; and to continue to look for ways to serve the creative needs of every student.

James Agee wrote on one occasion:

"In every child who is born under no matter what circumstances, and of no matter what parents, the potentiality of the human race is born again.

And in him, too once more is born our terrific responsibility towards human life and towards the utmost idea of goodness, of the horror of error, and of God."

The history of the College Board is most distinguished,

and I am certain that this vision of using tests--not to protect the system but to give opportunity to every individual--will continue to guide you in your work.

Thank you for inviting me to meet with you today.

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