

II. CURRICULUM

This brings me to priority number 2.

In the Carnegie Report, we say that

- Beyond proficiency in language,
- All students should complete a core curriculum to put their learning in perspective

In 1972, I was sitting in my office in Albany, New York.

It was a dreary Monday morning and, to avoid the pressures of the day,

I turned instinctively to the stack of 3rd class mail I kept on the corner of my desk to create the illusion that I was busy.

On top of the heap was the student newspaper from the university in the west.

The headline announced that the faculty, in a burst of creativity, had introduced a required course in western civilization after abolishing all requirements three years before (1972).

The students were mightily offended by the faculty initiative and in a front page editorial declared that

a required course is an "illiberal act"

The editorial concluded by asking rhetorically, how dare they impose "uniform standards" on "non-uniform people."

Frankly, I was startled by that statement.

I was startled that some of America's most gifted students, after fourteen or more years of formal education, still had not learned the simple truth that

while we are "non-uniform" we still have many things in common.

These students had not discovered the fundamental fact that while we are autonomous human beings, with our own aptitudes and interests, we are at the same time, deeply dependent on each other.

Today, almost all colleges in the United States have a requirement in general education.

But all too often

the so-called "distribution sequence" is "little more" than a "grab bag" of isolated credits.

Students complete the required courses

But what they fail to see are connections that would give them a more coherent view of knowledge

and a more authentic, more integrated view of life.

Barbara McClintock--the Nobel Winning Geneticist--said on one occasion that "everything is one." "There is," she said, "no way to draw a line between things!"

- I wonder if Professor McClintock has looked at a college catalogue in recent days.

Frank Press--the President of the National Academy of Sciences--captured this same spirit when he recently suggested that the scientist is, in some respects, an artist, too.

- Dr. Press went on to observe that "the magnificent Double Helix--which broke the genetic code--was not only rational--it was beautiful as well.

And when the physicist Victor Weiskopf was asked, "What gives you hope in troubled times," he replied, "Mozart and Quantum Mechanics."

But where in the college curriculum do students discover connections such as these?

There is, of course, no "single" strategy by which a common curriculum should be developed. Liberal learning can be achieved in a variety of ways.

Still, something more than "randomness" is required.

And in the Carnegie Report we suggest that the "core requirements" might be organized on the basis of the universal human experiences common to all people. And let me suggest 6 themes around which a core curriculum might be shaped.

1. We say in the Carnegie report that language is a universal experience--a priority I've just discussed.

2. We also say that there is--in every culture--a response to the aesthetic.

Indeed, we conclude that music, dance, and the visual arts are universal languages that connote feelings and ideas that words cannot convey.

Third, in our search for human commonalities we say that we are all born into institutions.

- And all students should learn about the formal and informal social structures that consequently shape other lives.

Fourth, all human beings on the planet have the capacity to recall the past and anticipate the future.

- And the core curriculum should help all students gain historical perspective.

Fifth, we all live by values and beliefs.

- And liberal education should help students sharpen their convictions.

And finally, in the Carnegie Report, we say that we are all part of the ecology of the planet.

- And through the study of science and technology all students should discover the natural world in which we are all embedded as working parts--to borrow Lewis Thomas's poetic phrase.

Indeed, I worry that this nation is becoming increasingly parochial at the very moment the human agenda is more global.

When I was United States Commissioner of Education, Joan Ganz Cooney who was the brilliant creator of Sesame Street came to see me one day.

- She wanted to start a new program in science for junior high school students.
- It subsequently was developed and its called 3-2-1 Contact.

In doing background research for the program, Children's Television Workshop, they asked junior high school students such questions as:

- "Where does water come from?" and a disturbing percentage said "the faucet."

- They asked, "Where does light come from?" and they said, the "switch."
- And "Where does garbage go?" "Down the chute."

The point is that we need a curriculum which helps students go beyond their own private interests and puts their lives in historical, social and ethical perspective.

More than 40 years ago, Mark Van Doren wrote that

the "Connectedness of Things" is what the Educator contemplates to the limit of his capacity.

Van Doren went on to observe that

- The student who can begin early in life to see things as connected has begun the life of learning.

This, it seems to me, is the goal of general education.

III. THE MAJOR

Before leaving the curriculum I'd like to say just one word about the major.

1. At most colleges today there's a sharp division between general and specialized education on the campus. The goal for many students is to get general education "out of the way" in order to pursue their major.
2. Students are becoming competent in a special field, but what they're not being asked to consider is competence to what end.

It's what I call the Boesky Syndrome.

In the Carnegie Report we suggest that:

- general and specialized education should be blended during college--
- just as they must be blended during life.

And we propose what we call The Enriched Major.

- By the enriched major we mean running general education "vertically"--from the freshmen to the senior year.
- And requiring a "Capstone Seminar" in the major so that students can put their specialty in ethical perspective.

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