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out in briefing book
for Crete. - May 31

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Draft #2

Remarks of
Ernest L. Boyer
U.S. Commissioner of Education
at the
Second Annual Ralph Tyler Address
Doane College
Crete, Nebraska
May 31, 1979

It's a very special honor to be asked to speak at a convocation named in honor of Dr. Ralph Tyler.

Dr. Tyler has been called "the father of educational evaluation" and "an educator's educator."

He has been adviser to Presidents (four of them) and an architect of President Johnson's education programs, which are still the cornerstone of ~~our~~ Federal aid-to-education. x

But Dr. Tyler has been to me a very special friend. For over twenty years I have gained from his very special combination of vision and proficiency, and Ralph Tyler has influenced me professionally more than any other person.

I was delighted when Dr. Tyler and his alma mater got together to create the National Institute for Career Development. I congratulate Doane College -- President

Heckman, and Institute Director Ed Watkins, and especially the board of trustees -- for identifying an important need and for responding in such a provocative and practical way. This Institute has clearly proved its worth in a very short time. And already it is indeed a model for higher education across the country.

I also commend the American Society for Personnel Administrators for its vision and commitment in co-sponsoring this second annual National Conference on Career Development.

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At the turn of the century, Samuel Gompers wrote:
"Education should provide so wide an understanding of the relation of one's work to society that no vocation could become a rut and no worker could be shut off from a full and rich life in his work."

The means by which this dream of Gompers was to be achieved -- a rich, full life -- was education, and yet for centuries this route was open only to the privileged few.

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For nearly three and one half centuries, the expansion of educational opportunity has continued to be a central public policy in this Nation.

Print p. 3

In America, we have continued to affirm that education and democracy are inextricably interlocked.

This goal -- this commitment to equal educational opportunity -- is still an unfinished agenda in this Nation, and it must be vigorously pursued.

II

But this evening I wish to suggest that the American commitment to education

--is not just a commitment to access

to our schools and colleges;

--it is a commitment to excellence and service too.

And while we celebrate the dream of expanding opportunity, it is essential that we focus not only on the entry point to college, but on its ends as well.

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p2*

We need to ask again the hard questions about our academic purposes.

We need to take a fresh look at the core of experiences which educated citizens must share in order to participate in community in a thoughtful and productive way.

Samuel Gompers captured well the spirit of this conference by suggesting that the picture of our education, the fulfillment of one work or inextricably interlocked

One hundred and twenty years ago, the Reverend Horace Bushnell -- traveled all the way to California to offer his readers "back East" this comment:

"The first and most difficult thing to apprehend respecting California is the climate.... But this is scarcely possible, without dismissing, first of all, the word 'climate,' and substituting the plural 'climates.'

For it cannot be said of California... that it has a climate. On the contrary, it has a great multitude of them, curiously pitched together, at short distances, one from another, defying too, our most accepted notions of the effects of latitude and altitude and the defences of mountain ranges."

o o o

problem

And the tantalizing ~~issue~~ that he posed is still

~~It's that lingering tantalizing question that brings us~~
~~with us here tonight. How can we provide an~~
~~here tonight -- should there be some "conscious organization"~~
~~students with what Comenius called "So wide an understanding"~~
~~to the curriculum -- same pattern of study that prepares our~~
in order to prepare them
students both for creative living and for productive work?

to put it another way what should
be included in something I shall call The
Core of Education?

~~And today we perpetrate the myth that students must
chose between the so-called liberal and the useful arts.~~

Of course, in this regard not much has changed. One student upon graduating from the University of California wrote:

"All these studies were simply separate tasks that bore no definite intrinsic relation to each other." The right studies were there; what was lacking was the conscious organization of them for the student."

That's what one new alumnus said -- in 1903.

On many campuses, the curriculum suggests to students a staggering incoherence of purpose and the requirements that remain are often expressed as "distribution requirements" -- which all too often is a nice name for "clutter."

This evening, in the remaining moments I should like to talk to you about the purposes of the undergraduate college, ~~which I believe have unlimited meanings~~ and indicate why I believe those principles include the goal of preparing students for productive work.

a word or two about the past. The truth is
First [^]one should indicate that every curriculum of the past was guided by some vision of coherence, *which reflected the values of the time.*

The classical curriculum that prevailed from the founding of Harvard College to the Revolution was based on the notion of

- o a shared social structure,
- o a communal view as to how all young minds should be trained,
- o and a common belief in God, an afterlife, the church, and the "rights" and "wrongs" that should govern life.

The modest, general education reforms from the Revolution to the Civil War did not challenge coherence. Rather they reinforced it. Science and technology and modern history were added to the rigid and required curriculum because society's self-image had expanded, not fragmented.

And paradoxically the race toward "free electives" which followed was in its own way rooted in "commonality." But what was "common" was the freedom of self-determination; what was "shared" was the right to be autonomous and unique.

When general education languished and died, it was largely because the commonality of self triumphed over the commonality of substance.

Radical individualism offered a more powerful and accurate image of the times than the earlier social anchor points.

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Here I must insert an important caveat.

I happen to believe that students must be free to follow their own interests, to develop their own aptitudes, and to pursue their own interests, to develop their own aptitudes, and to pursue their own goals.

~~After all--~~

~~Knowledge has expanded and
we have learned something
about individual differences--~~

Am convinced its time to rejoin that a
~~But~~ truly educated persons also

- o must move beyond themselves,
- o must gain social perspectives,
- o must see themselves in relation to other people and times,
- o must understand how their origins and wants and needs are tied to the origins and wants and needs of others. Such perspectives are central to the academic quest.

Insert from p. 5



And I should confess -- at the very outset -- that my own answer to that question is a cautious yes.

But I hasten to add that this does not mean an absolutely rigid course of study for every student.

After all--

- o To claim that our Nation is not one culture, but many;
- o to assert the rights of minorities;
- o to protect individual liberties from mass tyrannies;
- o to preserve the right to dissent, even to disobey--these are all keys to liberty. And to the extent that they have flowered in our midst, and have been affirmed by diversity on campus -- to that extent we may be justly proud.

III

But this story of diversity, with all of its validity and vision, has an unhappy sequel.

Today the safest thing one can say about a college diploma is that the student probably has been around the campus for about four years.

Today we seem more confident of the length of a college education than we do about its substance.

Move to
p. 8

IV

My point is this:

A college curriculum that suggests that students have nothing in common is just as flawed as one that suggests that all students are alike. And I believe that ~~the same~~ ^{if we are to} curriculum should underscore the fact that we do have common ^{experiences which} ~~can and must~~ ^{be} shared. ^{introduce students to the}

o o o

There is of course no single combination of courses to capture the essence of our oneness. But I'd like to suggest several possibilities to illustrate the point.

First, we share a common heritage, and we do have an obligation to help the human race remember where it has been--and how, for better or worse, it got to where it is.

- o All students must be introduced to the events, individuals, the great ideas and great literature that have contributed consequentially to human gains and losses.

- o An understanding of this past from which all of us have come should be required of all students.

Obviously, to talk about "our heritage" has a familiar ring. But a notion need not be rejected just because it is familiar, and if our schools and colleges do not help keep the past alive, we will not only have lost our past, we will have lost our future, too.

Here I should insert a word of caution.

It is not enough to be told that events have occurred, ideas have been thought, and people have been born and have died. It is not enough to be told that great literature has been written -- as important as this heritage may be.

- o The successful approach will always ask of past events what they have to do with us.

Perhaps we need to pick a dozen or so moments which are most consequential. To make that selection, our criteria would surely include

- o the density of the moment (that is, the way it serves as a magnet for social, economic, political, and intellectual forces);

- o the degree to which the event is the "crystallization of a historic characteristic" (for example, the neoclassic);
- o or a historic transition (for example, Newton);
- o and the way in which that moment radiates out to include ourselves.
- o to choose a few things carefully; to study them intensively and across disciplinary lines; and through them to see our own times -- these goals may be adequate for the new core -- rooted in our common heritage.

V

Second, we all confront the challenges of the present --
and our quality education should reflect this fact.

It has always seemed curious that most past experiments in general education have focused exclusively--almost compulsively--on the past.

- o They have been remarkably inattentive to the crucial common experiences in the contemporary world.

- o I believe a quality curriculum should also examine our existence here and now and focus on those contemporary circumstances that also shape our lives.

Here I have three examples to illustrate the point:

o o o

First, we are all engaged in the sending and receiving of messages.

- o Language is what makes us a unique species, and all students should be required to master the written and spoken word.
- o They should also understand how we use and misuse symbols, how we communicate not just with words, but also with mathematics and music and computers and dance.

Courses in communication should strive for "comprehensive literacy"--the ability to spot the hidden suppositions behind a message.

- o Students should, for example, learn how to deal critically with advertising and propaganda.

