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**WHAT IS AN EDUCATED PERSON?**

by  
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**Mississippi Arts Commission**  
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I'm delighted to join you at the

- 1995 Arts Education Conference here in Jackson
- and I congratulate the Mississippi Arts Commission for bringing us together,
- and for your outstanding work in making the arts available to all children,

especially the Vicksburg Arts in Basic Education Project.

**I admire profoundly your conviction that**

- **no one can claim to be truly education**
- **who lacks the knowledge and skills in the arts.**

**And celebrate your goal which seeks to assure that**

- **art students in kindergarten through grade 12**
- **have access to education in the arts.**

This afternoon I've been asked to

- put the arts in larger context,

and talk about an issue that has perplexed

- educators
- and philosophers
- and parents

for at least one thousand years.



Just what is an educated person?

- More precisely—
  - what should we be teaching students in our schools
  - as we approach century 21?

And to put my remarks in larger context,

- I'd like to begin by telling you a story.

I.

In 1972, I was sitting at my desk 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 third-class mail that I kept perched precariously on the corner of my desk
- to create the illusion of being very, very busy—it's an old administrative trick.

On top of the heap was the student newspaper from Stanford University.

- And the headline announced that the faculty at Stanford had reintroduced a required course in "Western Civilization,"
- after having abolished this requirement just three years before.
- Bear in mind, this was 1972.

The students, I discovered,

- were mightily offended by the faculty's brash act.

And in a front-page editorial, they declared that

- "a required course is an illiberal act."

And then the editors concluded with this blockbuster question:

- "How dare they impose uniform standards on nonuniform people?"

At first I was amused. And then deeply troubled by that statement.

I was troubled that some of America's most gifted students

- after 14 or more years of formal learning

still had not learned the simple truth that

- while we were "nonuniform,"
- we still have many things in common.

They had not discovered the essential fact that,

- with all of our diversity,
- there still is knowledge to be \_\_\_\_ as well as characteristics at the very core of our existence that bind us to each other.

**KEY POINT**

**And this brings me to the central theme of my remarks today.**

**Being an educated person surely means**

- **becoming well informed.**
- **It means acquiring essential facts.**
- **It means achieving "cultural literacy,"**
  - **to use E. D. Hirsch's helpful formulation.**

But to be truly educated, students also need to go beyond the isolated facts,

- putting their learning in perspective,
- discovering the connection.

The Nobel laureate, Barbara McClintock, wrote on one occasion:

- "Everything is one.

"There is," she said, "no way to draw a line between things."

And yet we have broken up knowledge into little boxes,

- a curriculum approach that conceals more than it reveals.

Children, when they come to school, keep asking "why."

- They are searching for relationships and patterns.

But after several years they stop asking "why,"

- and begin to ask, "Will we have this on the test?"

From "creativity" to "conformity"



I'm suggesting that to be well educated, students must acquire a core of knowledge

- in history
- and literature
- and science—
- and the arts.

But to move from information to knowledge and ultimately to \_\_\_\_\_,

- students also must put their learning in perspective.

And for this to be accomplished we need a coherent curriculum with coherence,

- one that goes beyond the separate academic subjects
- and uses the disciplines to illuminate larger, more integrative ends.

But where do we begin?

## CORE CURRICULUM

In a new Carnegie report called

- *The Basic School,*
- we suggest that the school curriculum might be organized
- not on the basis of the separate subjects,
- but on the basis of what we call the
  - "core commonalities."

**By core commonalities I mean those**

- **universal God-given experiences that are shared**
- **by all people and make us truly human.**

And while reflecting on the possibility of this new thematic structure,

- I concluded that there are, in fact, 8 universal experiences that bind us to each other.

And that within this integrative framework all of the

- traditional subjects might be coherently imbedded.

What we're proposing is not a new curriculum

- but a new way to think about the curriculum.

Let me describe them very briefly.

## I. THE LIFE CYCLE

First, at the most basic level,

- we all share the miracle of the life cycle
- with its beginning, growth, and ending.

It's an experience that's universal, of course.

And I've often thought that if you want to make connections in another culture

- take a baby.

The life cycle is at the very essence of our existence.

And yet the sad truth is that

- most students go through school without reflecting on the miracle of their own existence.

They complete 12 or even 16 years of formal schooling

- not considering the sacredness of their bodies,
- not learning how to sustain wellness,
- or pondering the dangers of drugs and alcohol
- or the need to be \_\_\_\_ to themselves or others.

It's really shocking that young people in America today grow up knowing more about

- their Walkman's
- or the carburetor of a car

then they do about

- the characteristics of their own bodies.

And if I were reshaping the school curriculum to help students see connections,

- I'd have one major strand of study called
  - "the Life Cycle"
- at the very core of common learning,
  - with a focus on nutrition, health, and wellness,
  - while relating all information always to the readiness of students.



I'm suggesting that being truly educated means

- learning about how one's own body functions.
- It means observing a variety of life forms.
- And—above all—it means reflecting sensitively on the sacredness of life.
- Without such knowledge about their own bodies, they grow insensitive to violence and abuse.

## II. LANGUAGE

This brings me to priority number 2.

In addition to the life cycle,

- all people on the planet also use symbols
- to express feelings and ideas.

First, comes life, then language.

After our first breath we all start reaching out to others.

- And a quality education surely means becoming proficient
  - in the written and the spoken word.
  - And discovering that numeracy is a symbol system, too.

The point is that our sophisticated use of language

- sets human beings apart from all other forms of life.
- And that it's through the miracle of words
  - that we are all connected to each other.

Consider the miracle of this very moment.

- I stand here vibrating my vocal cords.
- Molecules are bombarded in your direction.
- They hit your tympanic membrane;
- signals go scurrying up your eighth cranial nerve, and
- there's a response deep in your cerebrum that approximates, I trust, the images in mine. But do you realize the audacity of this act?

I'm encouraged that you're looking in my direction!

- But I've been a teacher far too long to confuse
  - visual contact with
  - cerebral interaction.

I'm suggesting that

- language is not just another subject,
- it's the means by which all other subjects are pursued.

And the new curriculum should include

- a second strand called
  - the use of symbols,
- which might include:
  - the history of language and great literature \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_
  - a study of mathematics as a symbol system.
  - And surely it would include speaking and listening and reading and writing across the whole curriculum,
    - since it's through clear writing,
    - that clear thinking can be taught.

## **ETHICS**

**But, above all, students in our schools should be asked to consider**

- **the ethics of communication,**
  - **since good language means**
    - **not just accuracy,**
    - **but honesty as well.**

Today, students live in a world

- where obscenities abound.

They live in a world where

- politicians use 60-second sound bites to destroy the integrity of their opponents.

They live in a world where

- cliches have become substitutes for reason.

And students, in the nation's schools, urgently need to be taught how to distinguish between communication that is

- deceitful and communication that is
- authentic.

I'm suggesting that to be an educated person means

- writing with clarity,
- reading with comprehension,
- being able to effectively speak and listen,
- and accurately compute.

But—beyond all this—education for the next century also means helping students understand that

- language is a sacred trust
- and that truth is the obligation we assume
- when we are empowered in the use of words.



### III. TIME AND SPACE

This brings me to priority number three.

The simple truth is that

- Beyond the life cycle
- and beyond language
- all people on the planet have the marvelous capacity
- to place themselves in time and space.

See beyond \_\_\_\_ and recall the past and anticipate the future.

We explore our sense of space

- through geography and astronomy
- which should be imbedded in the basic curriculum,

and we explore our sense of time

- through history.
- which is crucial, too.

And yet, we squander

- this truly awesome capacity to look in both directions,
- even neglecting our own roots.

Looking back, the most important mentor in my own life was my Grandpa Boyer—

- who incidentally lived to be 100.

Grandpa, at the age of 40,

- moved his little family into the slums of Dayton, Ohio.

He then spent the next 40 years running a city mission—

- working for the poor,
- teaching me more by deed than word—
- that to be "truly human" one must serve.

And yet, for far too many children, the influence of

- these "intergenerational models" has diminished.

Margaret Mead said on one occasion that

- the health of any culture is sustained
- when 3 generations are vitally interacting with each other.
- A "vertical culture" in which the different age groups are connected.

And yet in America today we're creating—what might be called—a horizontal culture,

- with each generation living all alone-
- infants are in nurseries,
- toddlers in day care,
- older children are in schools organized by age.
- College students are isolated on campuses.
- Adults are in the workplace.
- And older citizens are in retirement villages,
  - living and dying all alone.

For several years, my own parents lived in a retirement village,

- where the average age was 80.

But they also had a "day care" center there,

- and all the 3- and 4-year-olds had adopted grandparents
- to meet with every day and have a sense of bonding.

I'm convinced the time has come

- to break up the age ghettos.

It's time to build "intergenerational" institutions

- that bring the old and young together.

And in the new core curriculum—with a strand called time and space—

- students should discover their own roots
- and complete perhaps an oral history.

But beyond "their own extended family" all students also should

- become well informed about the influence of cultures that surround them
- and learn about the traditions of other cultures, too.

To put it simply, in the days ahead,

- students should study Western civilization to understand our past.
- And they should study non-Western cultures to understand the future.



But in a larger sense, I'm suggesting that

- a truly educated person is one who sees connections
- by placing his or her life in
  - time
  - and space.

#### IV. GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS

This brings me to core commonality number four.

In addition to

- the life cycle
- and the use of symbols
- and to the arts and to the aesthetic
- and our shared sense of time,

all people on the planet also hold membership in

- groups and institutions
- that consequentially shape their lives.

And to be truly educated means learning about the social web of our existence.

It means knowing something about family life,

- which is the nucleus of civilization according to \_\_\_\_\_
- about civics and our democratic \_\_\_\_\_.

And it also means discovering how

- group life varies from one culture to another.

Our son, Craig, lives in a Mayan village in the jungles of Belize.

And when we visit Craig each year, I'm impressed that Mayans and Americans

- carry on their work in very basic, similar ways.

The jungles of Manhattan and the jungles of Belize are separated by

- a thousand miles,
- and a thousand years.

And yet the Mayans, just like us, have their family units. They have

- elected leaders,
- and village councils,
- and law enforcement officers,
- and jails,
- and schools,
- and places where they worship.

At one level it's all very different,

- but at another level it's also very much the same.

I'm suggesting that we all hold membership in groups and institutions,

- a fourth strand in the basic curriculum.

And that all students should not only be introduced to the web of institutions in their own lives,

- but also engage in a cross-cultural study,
- which would compare, for example,
  - Santa Cruz, California,
  - with Santa Cruz, Belize.

## V. WORK

This brings me to core commonality number five.

The simple truth is that,

- with all our differences,

all people on the planet spend their time

- producing and consuming.

And a quality education surely means

- learn about the economy, about many systems,
- And it also means about \_\_\_\_\_ prepare adequately
- for the world of work.

The sad truth is that

- today's young people grow up in a culture preoccupied with "consuming,"
- with little understanding of what it means to actually "produce."

Students see their parents

- bring papers home at night
- and carry more papers off in the morning,
  - which seems to procreate overnight,
- but what is it exactly that parents do?



When I was Chancellor of the State University of New York, I took our youngest son, who was 8, to our cabin in the Berkshires on a weekend.

- My goal was to build a dock,
- and all day, instead of playing, Stephen sat at the water's edge,
- watching me do things, I'd never done before,
- and hearing me say things I'd never said before.

That evening, as we drove home, Stephen was quite pensive,

- and finally, after several miles, he said,
- "Daddy, I wish you'd have grown up to be a carpenter—
  - instead of you-know-what!"

I'm suggesting that a new integrative curriculum for the schools might also include a strand called

- "producing and consuming,"

with each student

- not only studying "simple economics" and learning about different money systems,
- but also completing for themselves a work project
  - to gain a respect for craftsmanship itself.

## VI. NATURAL WORLD

This brings me to commonality number six.

It's true that all people are different.

But it's also true that we are all connected to the

- ecology of planet Earth,
- in which we are embedded as working parts,
- as Lewis Thomas put it.

And to be truly educated for the next century means

- learning the scientific methods which introduces us to the natural world
- and beginning to understand our
- connectedness to nature.

David, my 4-year-old grandson in Belize,

- understands these connections very well as he
  - chases birds,
  - bathes in the river,
  - and watches corn being picked, pounded into tortillas,
  - and heated over an open fire.

But David's cousins who live in Boston and in Princeton,

- with the appliances,
- and asphalt roadways,
- and precooked food,

find it enormously more difficult to discover their  
connectedness to nature.

When I was United States Commissioner of Education, Joan Cooney,

- the brilliant creator of "Sesame Street,"

came to see me one day.

- She said they wanted to start a new program at Children's Television Workshop
  - on science and technology for junior high school students,
- so children could understand a little more about their world and what they must know to live.
- The program subsequently was funded and called "3-2-1 Contact."

In doing background work for that project, they surveyed some junior high school kids in New York City, and asked such questions as:

- "Where does water come from?" A disturbing percentage said "the faucet."
- And they asked, "Where does light come from?" The students said "the switch."
- And they asked, "Where does garbage go?" "Down the chute."

Their sense of connections went about as far as

- the VCR,
- the refrigerator door,
- and the light switch on the wall.

I'm suggesting that

- with all our differences,
- every single one of us is inextricably connected to the natural world
- through the air we breathe,
- the food we eat,
- the natural \_\_\_\_ that sustains life.



And all students—during their days of formal learning—should explore this basic commonality

- by studying the principles of science,
- by discovering how technology has profoundly shaped their own lives,
- and—above all—by learning that our very survival means respecting and preserving the earth we share together.

## VII. THE ARTS

This brings me to priority number seven.

Beyond the life cycle and beyond the use of symbols we call language,

- all people on the planet respond to the aesthetic,
- which is a language, too.

Dance is a universal language.

Architecture is a universal language.

Music is a universal language.

Painting and sculpture are languages that can be understood

- all around the world.

Isn't it remarkable how the gospel song "Amazing Grace" can stir a common bond among people

- whether they are from Appalachia or Manhattan?

And isn't it inspiring how "We Shall Overcome,"

- when sung in slow and solemn cadence,
- can stir powerful feelings,
- regardless of race or economic status?

And archaeologists—

- when they study past civilizations, examine the artifacts of art—
  - the pottery,
  - cave paintings,
  - and musical instruments—
- to determine the quality of a culture.

The arts are, above all, the special language of little children,

- who even before they learn to speak, respond intuitively to
  - dance,
  - music,
  - and color.

And the arts are uniquely helpful to children who are disabled.

Years ago I taught children who were deaf.

- They couldn't speak because they couldn't hear.
- But through painting and sculpture and movement and rhythm they discovered self-expression.

And the simple fact is that

- every student who enrolls in school
- has the innate urge and capacity to be artistically expressive.
- Each child can become proficient in art and in speech and writing.

And it's really tragic that, for most children, the universal language of the arts

- is suppressed
- and then destroyed

in the early years of learning

- because we still consider art a "frill,"
- when the president reminds us that we should behold creation and make a joyful noise.

I begin by suggesting that

- to be educated means discovering the connections.

And the arts are, above all else, an

- integrative discipline,
- one that can bring all the \_\_\_\_ back together.



Frank Press, president of the National Academy of Science, said in a recent speech that

- scientists are in some respects like artists.

And to illustrate the point he said that

- the magnificent double helix—which broke the genetic code—was not only rational,
- it was beautiful as well.

And yet, in most schools, science and art teachers

- live in two separate worlds.

When the world-renowned physicist Victor Weisskopf was asked

- what gives you hope in troubled times, he replied
- "Mozart and quantum mechanics."

The 15-year-old \_\_\_\_\_

- have methods because the equations are so beautiful!

But where in the school experience do students begin to see—

- at a more fundamental level—
- connections such as these?

I'm suggesting that for the

- most intimate,
- most profound,
- and most moving experiences in our lives,

we turn to music and dance and to the visual arts to

- express feelings and ideas
- words cannot convey.

The arts are also, as one poet put it:

- the language of the angels,
- which is a core subject that bring to the curriculum a coherence.

To be a truly educated person this surely means

- being sensitively responsive to the universal language we call art,

since the arts

- integrate the curriculum,
- stirs creativity
- \_\_\_\_\_ the disabled,
- and gives students a special language
- which goes beyond words and builds community across cultures and
- even across the generations.

## VIII. SEARCH FOR MEANING

Finally, all people on the planet,

- regardless of their unique heritage or tradition,
- are searching for a larger purpose.
- We all seek to give special meaning to our lives.

Reinhold Niebuhr put it most precisely when he said,

- "Man cannot be whole unless he be committed,
- he cannot find himself,
- unless he find a purpose beyond himself."

And, when all is said and done, to be truly educated means

- forming "values" and beliefs.
- And to state it in the old-fashioned way, developing convictions.

Vachel Lindsay wrote:

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

The tragedy is not death.

The tragedy is to die with

- commitments undefined,
- convictions undeclared,
- and service unfulfilled.

And with all the controversy that surrounds it,

- I'm convinced that a school is a place where students learn such old-fashioned virtues as
  - discipline,
  - honesty,
  - diligence,
  - loyalty,
  - and compassion,
- virtues that are conveyed by great teachers who model values in their lives.

Values are also taught through service.

- And I'm convinced that all students should complete a community service project working in
  - day care centers,
  - retirement villages,
  - or tutoring other kids at school.



## CONCLUSION

What, then, does it mean to be an educated person?

It means accruing a core of knowledge

- in history,
- civics,
- health,
- nutrition,
- literature,
- science,
- and the arts.

But it means going beyond the separate subjects and

- respecting the miracle of life,
- being empowered in the use of language.

**Being truly educated means**

- understanding groups and institutions,
- having reverence for the natural world,
- affirming the dignity of work.

And—above all—being an educated person means

- responding to the aesthetic
- and \_\_\_\_ goals to assure \_\_\_\_

These are the core competencies that integrate and give meaning to

- the old Carnegie Units.

I know how idealistic it may sound,

- but it is my urgent prayer that—in the century ahead—students in the nation's schools will be judged
- not by their performance on a single test,
- but by the quality of their lives.

It is my prayer that students in our schools

- will begin to see the world as a whole
- and be impressed both by
  - the beauty
  - as well as the challenges of the world around them.

And—above all—it is my urgent prayer that

- Julie—my 6-year-old granddaughter who lives in Princeton,
- and David, her 6-year-old cousin in Belize,
- along with all the other children,

will grow up knowing deep down inside

- that they are unique and also that we are all inextricably connected.

Fifty years ago, Mark Van Doren wrote,

- The connectedness of things is what the educator contemplates to the limit of his capacity.

And Van Doren concludes by saying that the student who can

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

And this, it seems to me, is what it means to be

- an educated person.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said,

- "Everyone can be great,"
- because everyone can serve."

And I'm convinced the young people of this country

- are ready to be inspired by a larger vision.