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WHAT IS PRACTICAL EDUCATION? *

T. H. BELL

U.S. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

IT IS A GREAT PRIVILEGE TO BE HERE AND HAVE THE HONOR OF ADDRESSING YOU GRADUATES OF UTAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE. IT IS ALSO GREAT TO BE BACK IN UTAH. I LOOK FORWARD TO MOVING MY FAMILY FROM THE WASHINGTON, D.C., AREA BACK TO SALT LAKE VALLEY IN A FEW WEEKS.

I ADMIRE UTAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE. IT IS A GREAT INSTITUTION, AND I AM SURE YOU GRADUATES KNOW THAT YOU ARE FORTUNATE TO BE RECEIVING A CREDENTIAL OF GRADUATION OR A CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION FROM IT.

I REMEMBER THE EARLY HISTORY OF UTC. I RECALL WHEN ITS APPROPRIATION WAS VETOED BY THE GOVERNOR AND IT ALMOST CLOSED. BECAUSE OF THE DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP OF YOUR PRESIDENT, AND HIS STRONG COMMITMENT, UTC MADE A MIRACULOUS RECOVERY.

I REMEMBER WHEN THIS INSTITUTION WAS LOCATED IN THE OLD LAUNDRY BUILDING, AND I RECALL WHEN WE BROKE GROUND FOR THE MAGNIFICENT NEW CAMPUS THAT YOU NOW HAVE ON REDWOOD ROAD.

ALL OF THIS IS A GREAT TRIBUTE TO YOUR PRESIDENT AND TO THE FACULTY OF UTC. FOR THIS REASON, AND FOR MORE THAT I WILL NOT GO INTO, I APPRECIATE VERY MUCH THE OPPORTUNITY OF BEING WITH YOU THIS EVENING TO SHARE IN YOUR GRADUATION.

* PREPARED FOR GRADUATION EXERCISES OF UTAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE AT SALT LAKE CITY; UTAH SPECIAL EVENTS CENTER, SALT LAKE CITY, JUNE 3, 1976, 7:30 P.M. MDT (9:30 P.M. EDT).

I MUST ALSO EXPRESS MY ADMIRATION FOR THE COURAGE OF PRESIDENT JAY NELSON. YOU MAY NOT KNOW THAT A FEW YEARS AGO HE INVITED ME TO BE THE COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER AT ANOTHER UTAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE GRADUATION, IN THE AUDITORIUM AT WEST HIGH SCHOOL. IN THE MIDDLE OF MY SPEECH, PRESIDENT NELSON COULDN'T TAKE ANY MORE. THEY RUSHED HIM OFF TO THE HOSPITAL. YOU MUST AGREE THAT IT TAKES COURAGE TO INVITE ME ONCE MORE TO BE YOUR COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER. I DO HOPE THAT ALL OF YOU WILL KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON PRESIDENT NELSON WHILE I GIVE MY SPEECH.

IN INVITING ME TO BE YOUR COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER, YOUR DISTINGUISHED AND PERSONABLE PRESIDENT VERY KINDLY LEFT THE TOPIC OF MY ADDRESS UP TO ME, BUT HE DID GIVE ME A FAIRLY STRONG HINT. HE SAID, TO USE HIS WORDS, "WE ARE A PRACTICAL INSTITUTION."

THIS LEADS TO TWO QUESTIONS: FIRST, JUST WHAT IS A PRACTICAL INSTITUTION? SECOND, IF IT OFFERS YOU AN EDUCATION THAT IS PRACTICAL, JUST WHAT SHOULD IT ELIMINATE AS BEING IMPRACTICAL? THESE TWO QUESTIONS LED ME TO SELECT FOR MY ADDRESS THE TITLE: WHAT IS PRACTICAL EDUCATION?

NOT LONG AGO I ADDRESSED A GROUP OF PRESIDENTS OF LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES WHO HAD GATHERED IN WASHINGTON, D.C., FOR THEIR ANNUAL NATIONAL CONVENTION. I TOLD THEM THAT I THOUGHT WE SHOULD "VOCATIONALIZE LIBERAL EDUCATION." THEN I WENT ON TO SAY THAT I ALSO THOUGHT WE SHOULD SEEK TO "LIBERALIZE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION."

THAT SPEECH CAUSED A BIT OF AN UPROAR. I RECEIVED A FLOOD OF LETTERS. MANY ACADEMICS EXPRESSED DISMAY THAT THE UNITED STATES COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION COULD BE SO LACKING IN HIS UNDERSTANDING OF THE LIBERAL ARTS AND SO DEFICIENT IN HIS APPRECIATION OF WHAT A TRUE LIBERAL EDUCATION CAN DO FOR OUR YOUTH. JUST AS PRESIDENT NELSON WAS STRONGLY HINTING TO ME THAT I SHOULD HAVE SOME PRACTICAL AND DOWN-TO-EARTH THINGS TO SAY TO YOU GRADUATES, I TRIED IN THAT SPEECH TO THE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE PRESIDENTS TO PERSUADE THEM THAT THEIR INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE MORE PRACTICAL.

YOU WOULD BE INTERESTED TO KNOW THAT AFTER THAT SPEECH I HEARD FROM THE WHITE HOUSE. PRESIDENT FORD HAS ON HIS STAFF A VERY DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR WHOM TIME MAGAZINE ONCE CALLED "THE PRESIDENT'S PROFESSOR." WELL, I HEARD FROM DR. ROBERT GOLDWIN, THE PRESIDENT'S PROFESSOR, ABOUT THAT SPEECH. WE HAD A DEBATE THAT SUBSEQUENTLY WAS WRITTEN UP IN THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

SINCE THEN DR. GOLDWIN HAS SPOKEN AGAIN ON THE GREAT VALUE OF LIBERAL EDUCATION. SO, I THOUGHT I WOULD USE THIS OPPORTUNITY AND THE SUGGESTION FROM PRESIDENT NELSON TO TALK ABOUT PRACTICAL EDUCATION. I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT LIBERAL EDUCATION AND PRACTICAL EDUCATION HAVE TO BE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE.

THERE ARE, OF COURSE, ALL KINDS OF POINTS OF VIEW ON THE PRACTICAL PURPOSES OF EDUCATION AND ON THE UTILITARIAN VALUE OF WHAT WE SHOULD TEACH AND LEARN. BUT THE EXTREMES BETWEEN WHAT VOCATIONAL EDUCATORS BELIEVE AND WHAT THE ADVOCATES OF THE LIBERAL ARTS BELIEVE SEEM TO BE MILES APART.

I THINK THAT THIS DISTANCE IS MORE APPARENT THAN REAL AND THAT BOTH LIBERAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CAN BE VERY PRACTICAL, OR CAN BE OF VERY LITTLE UTILITARIAN VALUE, DEPENDING UPON WHAT AND HOW WE TEACH. I SUSPECT THAT YOU GRADUATES COULDN'T CARE LESS ABOUT THIS ARGUMENT, BUT I DO THINK THAT THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS AND UTILITY OF WHAT YOU LEARN ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU BECAUSE THEY TOUCH YOUR LIFE.

DR. GOLDWIN, MY FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE IN THE FORD ADMINISTRATION IN WASHINGTON, EXPRESSES A DEEP FEAR THAT "THE FUTURE OF LIBERAL EDUCATION IS IN DANGER; ITS FUTURE IS PRECARIOUS AT BEST." HE OBSERVES THAT TECHNICAL COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS HAVE LITTLE TROUBLE IN FINDING SUPPORT THESE DAYS AND COMPLAINS THAT THIS IS BECAUSE THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY ARE TOO PRACTICAL MINDED. I QUOTE FROM A SPEECH HE GAVE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA ON MAY 5, IN WHICH HE DISCUSSED THE FUTURE OF LIBERAL EDUCATION IN AMERICA:

THE UNITED STATES IS, ABOVE ALL ELSE, A NATION OF VERY PRACTICAL MINDED PEOPLE. IF WE SPEND TIME AND MONEY AND EFFORT, WE WANT A RETURN. WE LIKE TO KNOW QUITE SPECIFICALLY WHAT WE'RE BUYING. IT'S EASY TO ESTIMATE THE VALUE OF A COURSE ON HOW TO UPHOLSTER A CHAIR, OR REPAIR AN AUTOMOBILE; EASY TO JUDGE WHAT PRICE MAKES IT WORTH YOUR WHILE, WHETHER FOR A VOCATION AS AN UPHOLSTERER OR AS AN AUTO MECHANIC, OR FOR A DO-IT-YOURSELF HOBBY. BUT HOW DOES ONE KNOW HOW MUCH MONEY OR TIME IS A GOOD INVESTMENT TO STUDY VICTORIAN LITERATURE OR ANCIENT AND MODERN THEORIES OF POLITICAL SOCIETY? YOU MIGHT BE

CONVINCED THAT SUCH THINGS ARE IMPORTANT, BUT HOW DO YOU PUT A PRICE ON THEM? AS EVERY SALES PERSON KNOWS, AND EVERY CONSUMER KNOWS, WHEN THE PRICE IS IN DOUBT THE SALE IS IN DOUBT.

YOU CAN SEE THAT DR. GOLDWIN IS APPROPRIATELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE WILLINGNESS OF THE TAXPAYER TO PAY FOR LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION. IN FACT, HE GOES ON IN HIS ADDRESS TO ASK TWO QUESTIONS THAT I THINK ARE VITAL TO ALL UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES:

SO THE QUESTION STILL REMAINS, WHAT IS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO TEACH AND TO STUDY AT CONSIDERABLE COST TO INDIVIDUALS OR TO SOCIETY AS A WHOLE? AND IS LIBERAL EDUCATION PART OF WHAT IS IMPORTANT? LONG AGO A LIBERALLY EDUCATED MAN WROTE THAT, TO A STARVING MAN, BREAD IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PHILOSOPHY.

IT SHOULD BE QUITE OBVIOUS TO ALL OF US HERE TODAY THAT THE KIND OF JOB-RELATED TEACHING THAT UTAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE DOES SO SUPERBLY IS EASIER TO JUSTIFY THAN SOME COURSE WORK OFFERED BY LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES.

AS YOU THINK ABOUT WHAT UTAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE REQUIRED YOU TO LEARN, YOU MAY THINK OF SOME THINGS THAT YOU STUDIED THAT YOU THOUGHT WERE USEFUL AND WOULD HAVE REAL VALUE TO YOU IN YOUR WORK AND IN YOUR DAILY LIVING. YOU MAY ALSO THINK OF SOME STUDIES, AND EVEN ENTIRE COURSES, THAT YOU CONSIDERED OF LESS VALUE AND IMPORTANCE TO YOUR FUTURE WORK AND TO THE PROBLEMS THAT YOU WOULD FACE IN LIFE.

OF ALL OUR NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA HAS THE SIMPLEST MOTTO. THE SCOUTS TELL US: "BE PREPARED." THIS SIMPLE ADVICE OBVIOUSLY APPLIES TO THE PURSUIT OF A PRACTICAL EDUCATION. PREPARE YOURSELF FOR WHAT IS AHEAD, STUDY THOSE THINGS THAT YOU WILL NEED TO KNOW, AND MASTER THOSE SKILLS THAT YOU WILL NEED ON YOUR JOB. BUT IT ISN'T ALL THAT SIMPLE.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS AHEAD FOR YOU? AS THE BOY SCOUT MOTTO ENJOINS, YOU CAN INDEED BE PREPARED FOR YOUR JOB TODAY, BUT WHAT OF TOMORROW? WILL A NEW INVENTION OR AN ADVANCEMENT IN TECHNOLOGY MAKE YOUR WORK AND YOUR SKILL OBSOLETE? WE DON'T NEED MANY BLACKSMITHS TODAY. PEOPLE TRAINED TO REPAIR MECHANICAL CALCULATORS AND ADDING MACHINES WILL GRADUALLY BE REPLACED UNLESS THEY LEARN TO SERVICE THE ELECTRONIC CALCULATORS THAT ARE THE "IN" THING TODAY. THE MARCH OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY CREATES NEW JOBS EACH YEAR AND MAKES SOME SKILLS THAT HAVE BEEN IN HIGH DEMAND OBSOLETE. SOME OF THIS OBSOLESCENCE IS GRADUAL, BUT SOME OF IT OCCURS QUITE SUDDENLY.

SO I CAUTION YOU TO KEEP UP WITH THE TIMES AND TO STAY CLOSE TO THIS INSTITUTION FROM WHICH YOU ARE GRADUATING. I'M QUITE SURE THAT YOU WILL NEED TO ACQUIRE NEW SKILLS OR AT LEAST UPDATE YOUR SKILLS VERY SOON. THAT IS WHY A DISCIPLINED MIND AND A CAPACITY FOR LEARNING, ALONG WITH A THIRST AND HUNGER FOR ADDITIONAL LEARNING, ARE ALL-IMPORTANT TO YOU AS YOU LOOK DOWN THE ROAD.

THE DEBATE BETWEEN THE LIBERAL ARTS ADVOCATES AND THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATORS IS NOTHING NEW. WE HAVE BEEN ASKING OURSELVES FOR CENTURIES THE DEEP QUESTION, WHAT LEARNING IS OF THE MOST WORTH? TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION IN OUR SEARCH FOR AN EDUCATION THAT WILL SEE US THROUGH A LIFETIME WE MUST LOOK AT THE BROAD ASPECTS—

WHAT IS PRACTICAL LEARNING ANYWAY? MY ANSWER IS THAT IT MUST BE MANY THINGS, BUT FIRST OF ALL IT MUST BE LEARNING THAT HELPS MAKE YOU A DISCIPLINED PERSON. WITHOUT LEARNING TO DISCIPLINE YOURSELF YOU WILL NEVER SUCCEED, AS CARPENTER, DIESEL MECHANIC, ARCHITECT, ARTIST, LAWYER, OR ANYTHING ELSE. WHETHER YOU GRADUATE FROM A TECHNICAL COLLEGE OR A UNIVERSITY, DISCIPLINE IS INDISPENSABLE.

WE CAN LEARN DISCIPLINE THROUGH ANY FORM OR MEANS OF EDUCATION, FROM LEARNING TO BE AN ELECTRONIC TECHNICIAN AT UTAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE TO EARNING A PH.D. DEGREE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AT UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY. DEPENDING ON WHAT THE INDIVIDUAL DOES WITH WHAT HE OR SHE LEARNS, A CERTIFICATE IN CARPENTRY OR A B.A. DEGREE IN FINE ARTS MAY REPRESENT A VERY PRACTICAL EDUCATION.

MANY CLAIM THAT THE DEEPEST MEANING IN LIFE CAN BE FOUND IN GREAT LITERATURE, ART, AND MUSIC AND THAT THEREFORE EDUCATION IN THE ARTS IS PRACTICAL EDUCATION. I CERTAINLY WOULD NOT DISPUTE THIS. BUT YOU TECHNICAL COLLEGE GRADUATES MAY FIND THAT YOU CAN UNCOVER DEEP MEANING AND BEAUTY IN SHAPING PIECES OF WOOD, METAL, OR PLASTIC. IT DEPENDS UPON WHAT YOU DISCOVER BOTH IN THE METAL THAT YOU SHAPE AND IN WHAT YOU DISCOVER IN YOURSELVES. MUCH OF THIS DEPENDS UPON THE TEACHER.

WHEN WE THINK OF UTAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE BEING WHAT PRESIDENT NELSON CALLS A PRACTICAL INSTITUTION WE MUST KNOW THAT ITS PRACTICALITY COMES FROM THAT UNUSUAL ENCOUNTER WITH A MASTER TEACHER WHO CAN TOUCH THE POTENTIAL TALENT WITHIN HIS OR HER STUDENTS AND AWAKEN IT TO SERVE THEIR NEEDS IN LIVING AND MEETING THEIR DAILY CHALLENGES.

THIS MOST MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP CAN KINDLE IN EVEN SUCH A SEEMINGLY MUNDANE COURSE AS BEGINNING SHORTHAND IF TEACHER AND STUDENT SUCCEED IN REACHING OUT AND TOUCHING EACH OTHER. IT IS PRACTICAL LEARNING AT ITS BEST, BUT SO IS THE LEARNING THAT OCCURS IN A PHILOSOPHY COURSE ON THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IF IT DISCIPLINES THE MIND, STRENGTHENS THE CHARACTER, AND BUILDS A BETTER HUMAN BEING. THESE OUTCOMES CAN HAVE A VERY HIGH UTILITARIAN VALUE IN TODAY'S COMPLEX WORLD IF THE TEACHER TEACHES IN A WAY THAT REACHES THE INNER SOUL OF A RECEPTIVE LEARNER.

SOME INTELLECTUALS CRITICIZE A COURSE IN REFRIGERATION AND AIR CONDITIONING AS NOT BEING TRUE EDUCATION BECAUSE ALL IT DOES IS TEACH A SKILL AND TRAIN THE STUDENT TO WORK WITH HIS HANDS. SUCH INDIVIDUALS FAIL TO RECOGNIZE THAT CURIOSITY CAN BE AROUSED, CHARACTER CAN BE STRENGTHENED, AND FORM AND BEAUTY CAN BE TAUGHT IN THE PROCESS OF DISCIPLINING THE HANDS. TROUBLE-SHOOTING A DIESEL ENGINE AT UTAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE CALLS FOR AS MUCH LOGIC AS DIAGNOSING A NERVOUS DISORDER AT OUR GREAT UNIVERSITY OF UTAH COLLEGE OF MEDICINE. THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF ANY COURSE OF INSTRUCTION REST IN THE MIND OF THE TEACHER AND THE MIND OF THE LEARNER.

A GREAT TEACHER--ONE WHO IS TRULY PRACTICAL IN THE DEEPEST SENSE OF THE WORD--MAY BE FOUND IN A JOURNEYMAN CARPENTER OR MACHINIST WHO TEACHES WITHOUT A COLLEGE DEGREE AT UTAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE OR IN THE PERSON OF SUCH A NATIONALLY RENOWNED SCIENTIST AS THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH'S DR. HENRY EYRING. GREATNESS AS A TEACHER INCLUDES AN ABILITY TO RELATE TEACHING TO REAL LIFE. IN THAT SENSE THE MASTER TEACHER HAS REACHED GREATNESS BECAUSE OF AN ABILITY TO REACH OUT AND TOUCH HIS OR HER STUDENTS IN WAYS THAT ARE MEANINGFUL TO LIFE AND TO LIFE'S PROBLEMS.

THIS REMINDS ME OF A STORY THAT ILLUSTRATES THE MESSAGE I AM TRYING TO CONVEY TO YOU:

IT SEEMS THAT A VERY COMPLICATED DIESEL LOCOMOTIVE JUST WOULD NOT START. AFTER THE EXPERTS AND ALL THE PH.D. TYPES HAD TRIED THEIR HAND AT IT, THEY CALLED IN A BLUE-COLLAR OLD-TIMER AND ASKED HIM TO GIVE IT A TRY. HE DID. HE PULLED A LITTLE MALLET FROM HIS POCKET, CIRCLED THE ENGINE A FEW TIMES, TWISTED A FEW KNOBS, AND DELIVERED TWO LIGHT TAPS ON A "WHATSIS." THE ENGINE IMMEDIATELY ROARED INTO LIFE.

WHEN ASKED FOR HIS BILL, THE OLD MAN SAID \$10,000 WOULD BE SATISFACTORY. THE OWNERS WERE SHOCKED AND ASKED HIM TO ITEMIZE HIS BILL. HE SENT THEM THIS:

"INFORMATION ABOUT DIESEL ENGINES--50¢

"TAPPING THE WHATSIS WITH A TACK HAMMER--50¢

"KNOWING WHERE TO TAP--\$9,999

"TOTAL--\$10,000"

AS I SEE IT, THE PROOF OF WHAT IS PRACTICAL AND USEFUL IN EDUCATION RESTS WITH THE PROFESSOR'S KNOWING WHERE TO TAP--KNOWING HOW TO REACH THE LEARNER'S INNER SOUL, TO DISCIPLINE HIS OR HER INTELLECT, AND TO APPLY WHAT IS LEARNED (WHETHER IT BE PHILOSOPHY, ART, LITERATURE, OR CARPENTRY) TO WHAT THE STUDENT AND SOCIETY BOTH WANT AND NEED. IN BOTH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE LIBERAL ARTS, THE TEACHER MUST TEACH THAT WHICH WILL RENEW PEOPLE IN THEIR WORK AND IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIVING.

I CERTAINLY AGREE WITH PRESIDENT NELSON WHEN HE SAYS THAT UTAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE IS A PRACTICAL INSTITUTION. UTC HAS NOT ONLY TAUGHT ALL OF YOU HOW TO DO USEFUL AND MEANINGFUL WORK. IT ALSO CONSTANTLY ADJUSTED AND ADAPTED ITS CURRICULUM OVER THE YEARS TO THE EVER SHIFTING AND CHANGING DEMANDS OF OUR ECONOMY AND OUR SOCIETY, AND IT CONTINUES TO DO SO. THIS IS THE MEASURE OF A GREAT INSTITUTION, AND WE CAN EASILY ADAPT THIS THINKING TO MEASURE A GREAT INDIVIDUAL.

IT IS A PLEASURE TO SALUTE YOU GRADUATES AND TO EXPRESS MY WARM ADMIRATION FOR UTC AND THE MAGNIFICENT WORK THAT THIS INSTITUTION DOES IN SERVING THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF UTAH.

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