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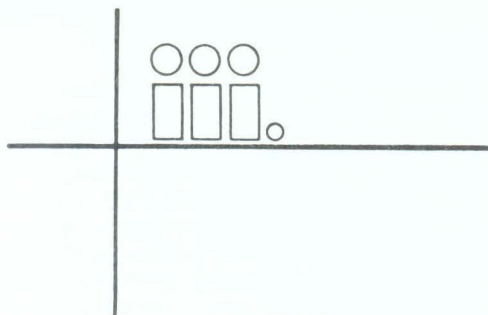
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General Education for Living and the Value of Work: Are They Compatible?

Noojin Walker

Almost ten years ago the United States Commissioner of Education, Sidney Marland, introduced into the educational vocabulary a new expression — career education. Since then we, in higher education and especially liberal arts and general education, have given little thought to the concept. Because all of us know that vocationalism has no place in a liberal arts education. Consequently, career education also has no place. Yet over the last few years I have observed what appears to be an erosion. Some faculty have moved from hostility to indifference, to cautious support, and, in some cases, to active support of the concept. Some view career education as the feature with the potential of bringing the much sought-after relevance to the instrumentalist position of general education.

Robert Goldwin wrote in his recent article about the future of liberal education that "Liberal education is in danger; its future is precarious at best." But, he goes on to say that liberal education has always been in danger, has always been in a precarious situation. The reason is that the aim of liberal education is to know the truth, and the activity of liberal education is to ask unsettling questions. Liberal education questions what society does not question; it challenges beliefs that society accepts as true; it insists that things which are obscure, complicated, and even dreary are really more deserving of our attention than things that are clear, simple, and easy. What could be more annoying? If, then, liberal education asks annoying questions of others, should it not now ask an annoying question of itself? And the most annoying question that can be asked is "Does career education have a place in the liberal studies?"

We might begin by attempting to describe what career education is not. Career education is not occupational specialization. It is not vocationalism. It is not a program to train laboratory technicians, or engineering assistants, or machinists, or lawyers. It should not be viewed as a narrow concept, and there is nothing anti-humanistic, illiberal, or anti-intellectual about it. It does not mean that teachers are to subordinate the objectives of their discipline to those of career education. It is not an extra topic or chapter to be added to an already overcrowded course. It does not mean that we lose sight of man's necessary

intellectual wholeness. What then is career education?

The purposes of career education are the same as the purposes for all education: to prepare the student to understand the society, to understand himself in relation to the society, and to develop the necessary skills to function successfully and with satisfaction within that society. However, career education does limit its focus to one function of the self in society — and that is to work, to the necessity for work, and the satisfaction of work.

Every student has a need to become intelligently aware of how his society functions and of the great historic, economic, and social forces shaping its future. Whether he wants to revolutionize the world or save it, he must acquire a historical perspective; otherwise, he will simply recycle society's previous wrongs. He must be informed, not only of the significant facts and theories about nature, society, and the human psyche, but also of the conflicts of values with the ideals of our times. He must learn how to recognize new values in every undertaking and to relate them to their causes, their consequences, and their costs in other values.

What does career education really mean? First, subject matter: It will provide the learner with the knowledge of the occupational structure of our economy and society, and its effect upon the liberation of man. Second, values: The learner will discover his obligation to productive work — a work ethic. Third, personal development: He will learn of career opportunities and the requisites of the various occupations. Next, an assimilation: He will learn of the interactions among self, work, society, and civilization. And, finally, decision making: Through career education he will be assisted in making decisions regarding his life's activities. Let us take a few of these elements, one at a time, and see if they fit logically within the objectives of general and liberal studies.

Career education does not dictate a movement away from the curriculum of traditional liberal education or of instrumental general education. The courses of study in the former remain intact; the humanistic concern in the latter remains paramount. But, career education does require that we relate man's cultural and humanistic advancement to his work — to the occupations of the disciplines. Throughout man's history of mere subsistence living, a condition which still prevails for a large part of the world's population, just staying alive has been reason enough for being alive. Now, uniquely, the majority of a whole society has been able to stand erect from unending toil and near starvation, and go beyond materialism to overcome its intellectual provincialism. It is through man's careers that we have been able to move from what Maslow called the survival needs to those of creativity, appreciation, and self-actualization. Careers and their economic impacts are central in allowing for intellectual and humanistic development. Work provides the resources for growth; work permits growth.

Traditional liberal education is concerned first with the body of subject matter content drawn largely from the cultural heritage of the western world. Instrumentalist general education is directed primarily toward the learner as a human being with the curriculum being organized around the needs, interests, and problems of modern life. Career education complements both philosophies. It in no way is intended to minimize the importance of the substantive content teachers seek to help the students learn. On the contrary, it is intended to serve in part as a way of helping the students learn more about this content. It combines the concept of knowledge for the benefit of one's own self with knowledge for the benefit of society. Career education, like general education, does not concentrate on "covering" a particular subject

area, but rather on “uncovering” the complexities that lie beneath the many apparently simple questions.

An unarguable purpose of liberal education is the cultivation of values and the understanding of the way values infuse all inquiry. Teaching of values in a public educational program is a difficult task because values are by nature controversial; many schools have stopped teaching them. A major casualty has been the consideration of the work ethic with its emphasis on the quality of work, promptness, diligence, and similar characteristics of the good worker. And, incidentally, are these not the same characteristics of the good scholar? Preceding stages of economic history produced value systems to provide needed incentives. An economy based on slavery could be justified only by some form of divine right. A work ethic which explained social status as the will of God promised rewards in heaven to those who served most docilely. Early capitalism needed incentives for frugality, self-denial, investment, and productivity; it needed what we call today the Protestant ethic.

The objective of career education is not necessarily to indoctrinate the student in the benefits of a particular work ethic but to assist him in integrating work values into his own personal value system. We can do this by exposing him to the work values held by others and by assisting him to understand how these affect the individual in society.

The student should learn of the citizens' obligation of involvement in the total work force and to recognize the value and worth of all work — be it paid or non-paid work — be it teaching, or laboring, or healing, or home making, or building, for no society can exist without work. Yet many people today feel that this essential value — work — is being eroded. In many segments of our society, we see a frightening reinforcement of this concern as persons move from a supporting role to that of being supported — from worker to drone. Some say that values are changing. Others ask if it is merely man's commitment to the values that is changing.

Sidney Hook writes, in *Philosophy of the Curriculum*, that personal development is an obvious objective of education, and it is perfectly legitimate to expect a liberal arts education to prepare a student for a meaningful vocation through the proper combination of required and elective courses and individual faculty guidance. In one way or another, proper liberal education always has.

As the learner discovers the great ideas, the great contributions made through the discipline, a question becomes: “How can I contribute?” The student needs to know the hierarchy of preparation, the requisites for productivity in the discipline, the academic and intellectual requirements for a satisfying career. Further, he needs to know whether he should pursue the endeavor vocationally or avocationally.

Training for a vocation is not the immediate goal of career education during liberal studies, but learning the economic implications and the career opportunities of the discipline is essential. We do not minimize the importance of course content. To the contrary, we use career education as a means of helping students to learn more about the content by showing the interactions between knowledge and work. One must remember that we are not totally concerned with what career one chooses, but rather that career information is acquired. As Hoyt writes, “Few decisions in life are more important than the choice of a marriage partner and the choice of an occupation. Yet, what two choices are more casually made and upon less information?” General education has a responsibility for the career education.

One cannot conclude a consideration of liberal studies and career education

without directing attention to the interactions of work, self, family, and society. No worker is unaffected by events taking place in his family. No family escapes the positive effects that come from what is regarded as a successful day's work or escapes the negative effects that result from a bad day on the job. Career education focuses upon the fact that home life and work are inextricably woven. Each family member has a responsibility to work — work which supports the family and work which supports society. All work, whether inside the family or outside, for pay or for no pay, has equivalent value and a profound effect. The quality of life of the family and society is directly dependent upon work.

Furthermore, a new scenario for the individual appears already to be happening, and seems likely to continue in the future. As technology and social need change, people will be forced to change their careers, occupations, and jobs more frequently, perhaps several times during a lifetime. Thus, the ability to change careers and vocations in midstream may become a prerequisite to survival. If we wish to lead a satisfying life, we must be willing to adapt to new demands. Jerome Bruner has said that to learn structure is to learn how things are related. Career education teaches structure — structure of the society and of its dependency upon work, structure of the family and of its dependency upon work, and structure of self and of its dependency upon work.

Mark Van Doren has written that, "Liberal education is sometimes distinguished from useful education, but . . . that distinction is unfortunate and false. All education is useful, and none is more so than the kind that makes men free to possess their nature." Career education is an element which can bring to liberal studies a relevance which allows one to possess his nature — to maximize his potential. But, career education is such an uncomfortable ideal for the liberal studies, and it is so untraditional. Yet, again, we are reminded by Van Doren who said, "The great tradition is a tradition of change and growth; ideas have never stood still." Career education is a very restless idea.

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