

# WHAT WOULD BOYER DO

BY GLENN R. BUCHER AND JENELL J. PATTON

*Few have had as great an impact in as many areas of higher education as the late Ernest Boyer. Today's educators, faced with issues that were embryonic or nonexistent in Boyer's day, are well served by revisiting his beliefs and ideas and asking themselves what he would do.*

**E**RNEST BOYER PASSED AWAY nearly a decade ago, and yet his vision of education is more relevant now than ever. At his memorial service he was called “one of the nation’s greatest leaders in education”; he was able to zero in on critical issues that go to the very meaning and purpose of education. He felt passionately that education needed to be built on a coherent set of values and a purposeful search for knowledge. He campaigned tirelessly to make

community the foundation on which education would be built. These and other views evolved slowly, grounded in his deep religious convictions, a humanist’s belief in the power of education, and a deep interest in social change. At this time in the life of our campuses, it is useful to look to this experience, know it, understand it, and apply it to today’s issues—some that were embryonic or even nonexistent in his day. What would Boyer do? To help us answer this question, we explore his history and thinking.

## A MAN OF RELIGION, HUMANISM, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

**B**OYER'S THINKING evolved first in a religious context. The son of devout Brethren in Christ parents, Boyer worshipped with them in a Dayton, Ohio, city mission founded in 1912 by Grandfather Boyer. Early experiences in speaking and leadership were received at Messiah and Greenville Colleges, pastoring briefly in Florida, and considering a foreign mission board position. His inclination toward tolerance, openness, and diversity was formed in these early years, as religious communities birthed and nurtured his religious perspective.

Paul S. Boyer wrote an intellectual biography of his older brother, and in the conclusion he characterizes Ernest Boyer's personality as shaped by "egalitarianism; restless dissatisfaction with the status quo; enthusiasm for innovation; sometimes utopian idealism; interest in a common core of learning; stress on ethics and the social claim; a consensus-building impulse; and tireless advocacy" (p. 31). Commitments to equality, idealism, ethics, human connections, community, and striving for the best were all the byproducts of deep religious commitments. Boyer was remarkable in his ability to balance commitments that at their core were "parochial" with the claims of a plural and secular world.

As a humanist, Boyer found his professional interest attracted by the educational world, moving him from direct work in the private to the public sector. Between 1965 and 1995 he held three major national posts and penned seminal works (*Quest for Common Learning*, *High School*, *College*, *Campus Life*, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, *Basic School*, and the Boyer report on *Undergraduate Education in Research I Universities*), all providing important direction for national education policy. His humanism was profoundly demonstrated in *Basic School: A Community for Learning*; it was his last book, published the year of his death, and now considered an "essential educational building block." In accepting the 1995 McGraw Prize in Education, he thanked the mentors who taught him "that excellence in education means a community for learning, the centrality of language, a curriculum with coherence, high standards authentically assessed, a creative climate, support services for children, and a focus not just on the intellectual but also on the ethical and moral development of students" (McGraw Prize brochure, p. 2). In *Basic School* these essentials were articulated as school as community, a curriculum with coherence, a climate for learning, and a commitment to character. His tone changes only slightly when discussing postsecondary education; his connections are a reminder that today's common description of educa-

tion's prekindergarten through baccalaureate "seamless web" is attributable to Boyer.

Boyer's religious and humanistic education perspective was complemented by his engaged civic perspective. For Boyer, service beyond self, care for the body politic, and building the human community beyond family and nation had foundations in religious principles and clear implications for action. Although he never lost his early skepticism about what the public sector can actually deliver, he did believe in citizenship. Before service learning and its more secular-minded cousin civic engagement achieved the popularity they now enjoy, Boyer was calling for a credit-bearing high school graduation requirement in release-time service. To understand *Scholarship Reconsidered*, currently the most popular of all Boyer's writings, is to see it as moving the notion of service into the center of the academic enterprise. He proposed the scholarships of application, discovery, integration, and teaching partly as a critique of more elitist notions of university research. Then he offered "the scholarship of engagement" as an encompassing category, one that continues to require further development.

To make certain his point on this was clear, Boyer sent the *Scholarship Reconsidered* manuscript to a distinguished Princeton historian with the note: "I don't think you'll like this very much, but please give it a read." The response he received was reassuring: "You're right! I don't like it very much." A milder version of this sentiment was offered by brother Paul, a distinguished historian recently retired from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Paul acknowledged that though his brother might not have given the scholarship of discovery its due, his passion for the practical could have been the explanation.

Boyer knew the religious perspective had to be opened and translated if it were to have currency in public, pluralistic, secular settings. He knew that sectarian church colleges, however important, are not the only worlds of higher education. Though he did not abandon service learning for the language of civic engagement, certainly he learned that notions of "community" and "service" are partly in the eye of the beholder and a function of one's sociology of knowledge—that is, where one sits. There exist, he believed, a rich and compelling array of communities and ways of applying knowledge in and beyond the academy.

He was too much of a public servant to allow values and knowledge to crowd out application. He cared too much about education to allow it to be prescribed by narrow notions of values or application. He was too much of a moralist to talk about education or service devoid of a foundation. Boyer's diverse professional

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experience speaks to an inclusive view of the educational world. His unusual mix of public and private, small and large, governmental and nongovernmental worlds required that he keep these three perspectives in balance. The three constituted a self-corrective dynamic.

## VISION IN PRACTICE

**B**OYER'S VISION for education lives today in projects under way at colleges, universities, and organizations throughout the United States and abroad, and now at the Boyer Center at Messiah College. In August 2002, the center gathered twenty-five educators who represent and direct "Boyeresque" projects, to discuss among other issues how his legacy informs their work. At the end of the weekend, the group named their collective "the Boyer network" as a means of continuing the conversation. Their projects illustrate how Boyer's legacy continues to have an impact on American higher education, including the American Association of Higher Education's efforts on faculty roles and rewards; projects to build campus community, service-learning, and civic engagement; and the work of the National Basic School Network. Though vast in scope and impact, they represent a fraction of the

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The Boyer Center and the Agapé Center both serve local, national, and international education and civic communities. See <http://www.boyercenter.org> and <http://www.messiah.edu/agape> for more information.

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projects sparked by his vision. Implicit in these and other efforts are widely applicable lessons.

## FACULTY ROLES AND REWARDS

**I**N *SCHOLARSHIP RECONSIDERED* (1990), Boyer urged institutions to strike a balance among research, teaching, and service as fundamental intentions of American higher education. This was a shift from a linear notion of teaching and research to an equilateral triangle including service. Boyer described how institutions attempt to practice an equilateral educational approach but rarely recognize faculty efforts with professional performance merit in each area equally. Given this understanding, Eugene Rice (the primary collaborator on *Scholarship Reconsidered*) and Boyer argued for enlarging the perspective of the professoriate. The new paradigm consisted of four separate, yet overlapping, functions: the scholarship of discovery (research), the scholarship of integration (connections), the scholarship of application (engagement), and the scholarship of teaching (pedagogy). This conceptualization sought to recognize scholars who not only skillfully explore the frontiers of knowledge but also integrate ideas, connect thought to action, and inspire students. Under this expanded definition, faculty members can approach their work from their preferred scholarship perspective.

In effect, Boyer and Rice challenged current notions of research as being the only scholarship; they called for a redefinition of faculty efforts to meet institutional responsibilities in teaching and civic engagement. Early in 1990, the faculty rewards system became a national issue, addressed a few years later by the creation of AAHE's Forum on Faculty Roles and Rewards in partnership with the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. The intent has been to assess faculty expectations, evaluation, and reward structures. With Boyer and Rice's definitions of scholarship and

understandings of faculty promotion and rewards, AAHE has offered direction and practical guidance for institutions on these critical issues.

### CAMPUS COMMUNITY

**I**N *CAMPUS LIFE: In Search of Community*, Boyer suggested that successful communities at America's colleges and universities are purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative. He argued that these principles could serve as a framework for governance in higher education, strengthen existing campus communities, extend into surrounding communities, and provide a model for the nation as community. Bill McDonald's recent case study of five institutions, *Creating Campus Community: In Search of Boyer's Legacy*, demonstrates how these principles are still embraced at dissimilar institutions (Pennsylvania State University, Messiah College, Oregon State University, Carson-Newman College, and the State University of New York at Stony Brook). These institutions embody the Boyer principles in intentionally shaping and designing campus community. Through integrating curricular and cocurricular educational programming, campus communities are building stronger infrastructures for student learning. Within community settings, students are connecting the fragmented learning often associated with specialized educational endeavors by extending classroom discussion into the residence halls and other areas of involvement on campus. Currently, the Boyer Center is developing a Building Educational Community Collaborative, which will advance Boyer's commitment to higher education's community-building mission in society. Project coordinators plan to establish a resource clearinghouse, develop assessment tools and strategies, identify best practices, and foster scholarship on educational community. Plans are also under way to review data collected for the *Campus Life* study toward the possibility of re-publication.

### SERVICE LEARNING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

**B**OYER EMPHASIZED both the need for campus community and affirmed the role of education in developing citizens committed to the common good. He emphasized the function of service in introducing students to new people and ideas. By expanding student understanding and experience in the world, he believed students can integrate disparate components of their academic life and assist in meeting the needs of society. The sense of service that can be instilled in students should begin, he suggested, before college. In 1983, he published *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*. After meeting with students, parents, and administrators from across the country, he became convinced of the need for high school students to believe in their ability to be contributing members of society. Boyer recommended an academic service term to help build community and common purpose within the school. As each student developed pride through service, Boyer envisioned the school community positively affecting the community outside school walls. He introduced the Carnegie Unit of Service to encourage schools to implement a service requirement based on a minimum of 30 hours per year, a total of 120 hours over four years. Students could complete the unit through serving within the school or the community, or through paid employment. Several schools around the country are now moving into their second decade of administering service programs for their students.

The impact is both external and internal to the classroom. Pedagogical approaches that incorporate service learning and civic engagement offer faculty teaching methods that engage students. Rather than performing routine academic exercises, students learn how theoretical knowledge is applied to real-life situations. Service enables traditional-aged college students who are searching for a sense of identity and meaning

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in their lives to reach beyond their self-interest and begin to grapple with societal issues associated with community development and empowerment. The number of teachers from whom students may learn expands as they are taught by professors and the people they serve. This form of scholarship reiterates Boyer's notion of application and answers his questions: education for what purpose, and a competence to what end? Since Boyer's initial writing, service learning and civic engagement have become ubiquitous topics in higher education circles. AAHE recently published a seventeen-volume work, edited by Edward Zlotkowski, on service learning in the academic disciplines, and the AAC&U periodical *Peer Review* recently dedicated an entire issue to education for citizenship.

## THE BASIC SCHOOL NETWORK

**I**N 1994, the National Basic School Network was organized with twelve demonstration schools as a direct outgrowth of Boyer's report from the Carnegie Foundation, *The Basic School: A Community for Learning*, published in 1995. Today, the network numbers well over one hundred actively engaged schools, and interest continues to grow. It has been identified by the federal Department of Education as one of seventeen programs recommended for Title I funding initiatives. Diverse network membership includes public schools in urban and suburban settings, private Christian and Catholic institutions, a Native American tribal school, charter schools, and American overseas schools. The network has been transformed from a small cohort of schools to a closely coordinated group of regional centers nationwide to which member schools are attached (Blacksburg, Virginia, Iowa City, Kansas City, and San Antonio). Regional centers work together to offer a consistent array of services and training institutes to interested schools and districts across the nation and abroad.

The network is a product of Boyer's belief, expressed in *College*, that education must be a seamless experience where learning is interconnected across all

levels. Under Boyer's influence, the Carnegie Foundation began to study the first ten years of life, working on the assumption that young children learn best by following their curiosity and not categories of knowledge. Boyer concluded that an elementary school education must be built comprehensively and coherently.

The Basic School is focused on academic content and development of a school community. The six principles Boyer established in *Campus Life* are repeated in the Basic School model: "Every classroom is, itself, a community. But in the Basic School, the separate classrooms are connected by a sense of purpose, in a climate that is communicative, just, disciplined, and caring, with occasions for celebration." He believed that students, parents, teachers, and administrators need to connect with one another and form a community within their school walls. He posited that as the Basic School unified within itself, this sense and spirit of community would be embraced beyond the school, thus bringing neighborhoods together. This breaking down of barriers within a community and enabling children from a young age to understand the interdependence of society would assist in development of citizens working together for the common good.

## AFTER BOYER

**W**ITH ALL THE thought-provoking work resulting from the combination of perspectives that is the unique Boyer legacy, colleges and universities continue their tendency to separate mission, curriculum, and civic engagement: mission becomes the prerogative of the trustees and the administration, the curriculum is the faculty's to determine, and student civic engagement is what student affairs professionals are assigned to handle. Often one of these agendas drives the other two. Traditionally, it has been curriculum, but one can think of institutions where a tightly honed mission dominates both the educational agenda and how the institution presents itself beyond the campus. The applied service agenda also can dominate the other two when external forces predominate.

What results when institutions favor two of these educational perspectives over the third? In cases where mission and curriculum are the esteemed values of an institution to the exclusion of application, forms of “knowledge for the sake of knowledge” and institutional elitism may well result. In cases where mission and service are held exclusively and drive the curriculum, institutions may be inclined to espouse groundless forms of experiential service. In cases where mission is dropped out of the equation, an institutional tendency to go either with curricular faddishness or heavy-handed service may result.

A recent article in *Change*, “Mission Possible?: Enabling Good Work in Higher Education,” called for alignment and integration among sometimes competing educational forces. The theme of alignment was developed in a recent major study of healthy professions, *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet*. Summarizing application of qualities of healthy professions to higher education (a current major project), the authors suggested that “what we call good work is likely to happen when three conditions are met: the work lives up to the best practices of the domain; it responds to societal needs; and it is experienced as meaningful and enjoyable by those who do it” (p. 47).

It is a short distance from these conditions to Boyer’s perspectives. The religious perspective that influenced him corresponds to those educational practices informed by values and mission. The curriculum fulfills its role when the perspectives of those who teach and learn find their work meaningful and enjoyable; that is, humanizing for all. Societal needs pertain to the engaged civic perspective through service and application. In combination, Boyer’s ideas call us to make a connection between educational and social change.

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