

TWO KINDS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

JULIUS T. HOUSE

State Normal School, Wayne, Nebraska

ABSTRACT

There are two schools of thinkers who are interested in vocational education: (a) those who think in terms of the child and the job; (b) those who think in terms of the child and the social process. *The narrower view of vocational education.* The plan of vocational education proposed by the first group tends to stratification of social groups by (a) rigid division into managers and workers; (b) exploitation of weaker groups; (c) establishment at public expense of an institution to perpetuate division. Objections to the plan are: (a) this very division; (b) loss of labor leadership; (c) general lowering of intelligence in the labor groups. *The social view of vocational education.* The second group of educators plan to institute vocational study that shall bring the child into contact with the social world in which the vocation functions. The child will therefore study: (a) the general social purpose of vocations; (b) the present social efficiency of the same; (c) the relation of rewards to the development of a standard of living. The needs of childhood should be met by (a) better pay to adult labor; (b) more broadly efficient schools.

There are two schools of thinkers interested in vocational education. One of these is individualistic, thinks in terms of fitting the child to the job, accepts the present economic system with little, if any, criticism. It would isolate consideration of the vocation, so far as possible, from consideration of its social purposes. Psychologically its plan is based upon habit, with no thought of developing in the child a sense of the relation of his work to the whole social process. To secure the result sought there must be early separation of technical schools from the rest of the school system. It is proposed to begin with the seventh grade, the so-called junior high school.

The purpose of the technical school is and will be to get the answer, already known to the teacher, by the shortest route. Emphasis will be laid on rapid calculation; swift, effective movement; automatic response. The typewriter, the shorthand notebook, the hammer and nail, the stove, the furnace, the retort, are the instruments of education. A technique of salesmanship and advertising, without the regard to the ethics of these operations and with no comprehension of the principles of psychology, is

developed. Rough-and-ready adaptation to a rough-and-ready business world is the goal.

Certain results follow: (1) Even more rigid division of industrial life between two groups: those who manage, in whom power of initiative is vested; those who are skilled in narrow processes with no outlook upon the meaning of the work. (2) The exploitation of this isolated class. (3) The establishment of an institution to perpetuate this condition. Custom is already being instituted of sending the children of poor families to this manual-skill-producing school. (4) Public taxation to support institutions to assist business based on the supposition that when business prospers moral values take care of themselves.

There are powerful forces behind this plan and it were well that it be thoroughly scrutinized now. It appeals to the employing class on the side of reduction of cost and improvement in efficiency. The cost of labor turnover, "hiring and firing," is to be reduced, the apprenticeship that now occurs in the countinghouse and the shop is to be transferred to the schools. Production is to increase and the expense of preparation is to be borne by the public. When the apparent selfishness of the plan is noted the reply is that business pays the school taxes and in return should have what it needs.

On the educational side some of the schoolmasters are won by the pitiful plight of the youths who early leave the school for the industries. It is believed that the chief task of the school is to fit the youth for a place in the economic process. Investigations have emphasized the appalling loss to society in countless ways due to inability of boys and girls to "make a living."

These schoolmasters further urge that their plan will tend to lengthen the school life and therefore (?) the general intelligence of the laboring classes. Objections to the plan are manifold: (1) It institutionalizes class separation; stratifies society yet more rigidly. (2) It further weakens the laboring classes. There is no provision for leadership among their number. The whole thought is centered on skill and dexterity, with no consideration of the larger aspects of the task. The leaders of society are to be trained in a different sort of school. (3) If the plan carries we may look for a general lowering of the social intelligence of the laborers.

Life will mean nothing except a job. Important as a job is, yet it makes only one small fraction of the socially efficient life. If our laboring classes are to be socially fit they must be introduced to more, not fewer, points of view. It is to be noted that the most ardent capitalistic supporters of this plan hope to make it one weapon in their war against the labor unions.

The second group of thinkers, seemingly few but with men like John Dewey leading, are interested in vocational education as a means of introducing the child more intimately into the life of society. It is believed that such study should be directed to the perception of the relation of vocations to all the social process. Therefore all the students are to study all the vocations. The choice of a life-work will be, then, only a by-product of the training—important indeed, but still a by-product. Already such work is done in the grades. It remains only to enlarge it and relate it to the proper sciences as the later years of school life are reached.

Such vocational study does not call for early specialization, with its division of the high school into “practical” and “cultural.” Rather the opposite. By realizing the meaning of all occupations it seeks to create a free will, with resulting delay of choice of occupation and specialization.

With such ends of vocational training accepted, it is worth while to consider what items should enter into such a course.

1. An examination of the vocation as to the service it is to render to society. There are antisocial businesses, businesses positively detrimental in all their workings. Then, there are businesses that serve legitimate ends but in a socially inefficient manner. They are incompetent and parasitic. To all these the student brings the spirit of criticism.

2. All industries and professions have need of frequent reform and readjustment. What is the present efficiency of this vocation in social service? This question must the student investigate whether the task be an industry or a profession. What must the employer, the laborer, the lawyer, the preacher, the teacher do to socialize his employment?

3. What are the rewards? Is the pay sufficient to maintain a human standard of living? Here the school has a supreme opportu-

nity to prepare the ground for social and industrial reform. The consideration of the wage opens the questions of child labor, over-worked women, insanitary factories. Such vocational education presents the challenge of our ideals to the industrial and professional world to square the conditions of work with the conceptions of human worth held by the American people. It opens to the child the meaning of industrial skill with its larger wage, its mental stimulus, its higher status, and so tends to deprive the industrial monster of the ignorant laborer who is now exploited. There is more than a suspicion that this latter conception will not receive the enthusiastic support of those who seek to train apprentices at public expense.

It is easy to sympathize with a movement to fit a boy for a job and to make industry more efficient. Is there a better way to accomplish this than to establish, at public expense, technical training for children of tender age?

1. How would it do to pay a living wage to every efficient laboring man in order that his child may at least complete the high school and become a technician, if necessary, after that? Such a course might reduce dividends, but until there is an actual shortage of material goods in the world, dividends may ethically be reduced to pay labor.

2. Perhaps society might, meanwhile, multiply its gifts to vocational education of the second sort. Much time might thereby be saved and thus boys and girls might be prepared earlier for their industrial life and yet be more generally intelligent.

3. If the educational system needs supplementing, may we not rightfully expect business concerns to train their own apprentices at their own expense, not at the cost of the general community?