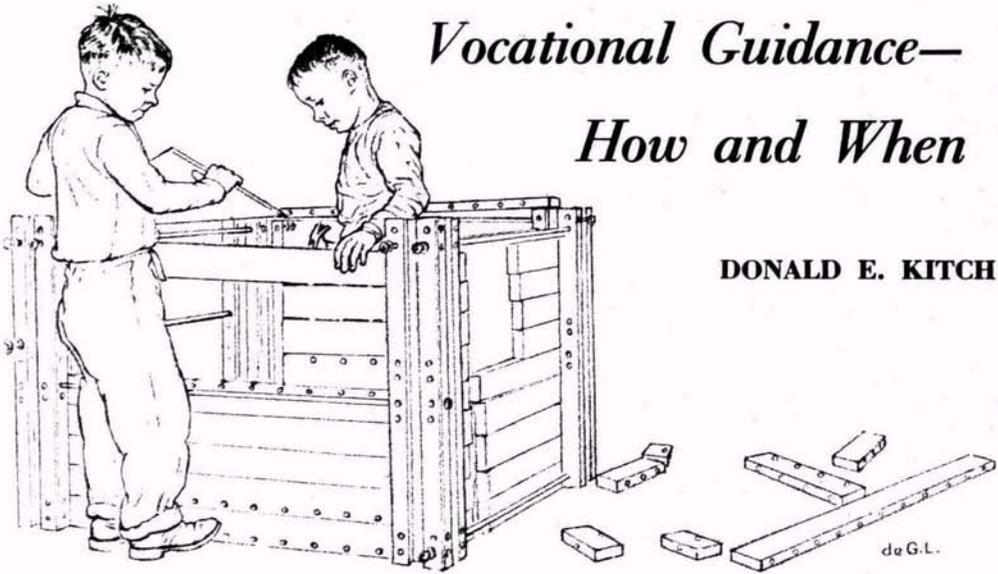


Vocational Guidance— How and When

DONALD E. KITCH



Some assumptions upon which a sound program of vocational guidance is based are examined in this article. Procedures which may be of assistance to school people in developing such a program are also suggested.

EACH year some two million young people graduate from high schools throughout the United States. Approximately an equal number of youth leave school annually without finishing high school. Each of these individuals faces the task of finding a place for himself in the adult world, a task that grows increasingly difficult as the nation's economy becomes more complex. The future of the nation and the happiness of the individuals themselves depend to an important extent upon the success with which these youth solve the problems associated with finding and undertaking suitable adult roles.

A democratic society makes certain demands upon its youth. It expects each to assume a shareholder's responsibility for the conduct of government

at the local, state and national levels. It expects that most of them will undertake the obligations involved in the establishment of a home. It anticipates that each will be willing and able to perform his share of the work that society needs to have performed. To the home and the school are delegated the major share of the responsibility for making certain that each young person, as he approaches adulthood, is prepared to undertake successfully these and other appropriate roles.

Statements of educational objectives have recognized the responsibility of the schools for assisting youth to achieve a satisfactory occupational adjustment. Recent studies of public opinion indicate that the public expects this type of service from its schools. A public opin-

ion study completed in Pasadena in connection with a recent survey of the schools in that community shows that 84 per cent of the citizens expect the four-year junior high schools to provide assistance in the selection of an occupation and that 85 per cent believe that these schools should offer training for a job or vocation.¹ Recently the Palo Alto Education Council, a citizens' group, studied the opinions of parents in that community as to the services desired from their schools. Two-thirds of the parents believed that the schools should be responsible for helping students select a vocation and 45 per cent felt that every student should be prepared to earn a living by the time he graduated from high school.² Indications are that the public is inclined to go along with the educators in respect to the responsibility of the schools for helping young people to work out a satisfactory occupational adjustment.

How can the public schools increase their effectiveness in helping young people to develop sound occupational objectives? In the past, efforts in this direction have been based upon the apparent assumption that decisions concerning occupational goals are arrived at largely through an intellectual process. Efforts have been directed toward helping individual students to gain a better understanding of their interests and abilities, to gain a broader knowledge of their educational and occupational opportunities, and then, through

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counseling and appropriate group activities, to integrate the two sets of facts into a program of occupational selection and training. Most activity of this type has been developed at the high school and college levels because decisions have to be made at that time as to specific programs and because the intellectual nature of this process seems more suited to that level of maturity.

Assumptions Underlying Program

Perhaps the time has arrived to examine with a critical eye the assumptions upon which such a program of vocational guidance is based. Such an examination need not imply that the procedures are altogether ineffective, but rather that it might be possible to improve upon them. Certainly an important step in the strengthening of the occupational adjustment services provided by schools can be taken if a satisfactory theory as to how occupational choices are made can be stated and tested. A beginning in this direction has been made by a team of workers at Columbia University. Team members came from the fields of economics, psychiatry, sociology and psychology. The report of their study was published in 1951.³ A long-term study of a somewhat similar nature is now being carried on under the direction of Donald E. Super, professor of education, Teachers College, Columbia University. It

¹ Clyde M. Hill and Lloyd N. Morrisett, *Report of the Pasadena School Survey, 1951*. Pasadena, California: Pasadena Board of Education, 1952. p. 72.

² Wilford M. Aikin, "What Do People Want From Their Schools?" *The Kiwanis Magazine*, May 1952.

³ Eli Ginzberg, Sol W. Ginsburg, Sidney Axelrad, and John L. Herma, *Occupational Choice: An Approach to a General Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1951.

is too early to formulate specific conclusions concerning the exact nature of the occupational choice process, but, on the basis of reports from the above studies and the experiences of persons who have engaged in vocational guidance work, it is possible to suggest certain principles or assumptions that should be considered by curriculum and guidance workers in connection with the development of vocational guidance programs in schools.

1. *The selection of an occupation is the result of a series of decisions that are made over a long period of time rather than the result of a single decision.* These decisions are cumulative in effect in that they tend to limit or condition later decisions. They occur as the result of experiences that are a part of the total growth and development process. Ginzberg and his associates tentatively identify three stages in the decision-making process: fantasy, tentative and realistic.⁴

2. *Decisions concerning occupational objectives are strongly affected by non-intellectual factors that frequently exert a subtle and unrecognized influence.* The child who learns to avoid situations that result in dirty hands or clothing does not do so because of intellectual choice. Yet this particular aspect of his personality pattern will limit his later choice of an occupation. The attitudes he acquires from other individuals with whom he identifies strongly may exercise important influences upon his ultimate selection.

3. *The range of occupational choices possible for any particular individual is limited by his knowledge of the possible choices open to him.* From the

standpoint of an individual, it may not be important that he know of occupations with which he is not familiar. He can fit into any one of a number of jobs because of his inherent adaptability. From the standpoint of society, it is important that young people be helped to explore the great variety of jobs that make up the labor force. It should be added that knowledge of possible occupational choices must be accurate knowledge if it is to form the basis for a sound decision.

4. *The ability to make an occupational choice is significant evidence of a desirable degree of maturity.* The adolescent who is able to see himself as a future adult worker indicates that he has the ability to recognize and accept for himself a socially acceptable adult role. He thinks of himself as the kind of person who can meet the demands of his culture.

Procedures Can Aid Adjustment

From principles such as these, it is possible to draw implications as to procedures that can be followed by curriculum and guidance workers in the development of learning experiences that will help individuals to develop sound occupational goals.

1. *The school's program for promoting occupational adjustment should begin when the pupil first enters school and should continue as long as he remains in school.* This does not mean that something new should be added to the curriculum. It does mean that present curriculum experiences should be examined for the purpose of determining how they can contribute to the objective of occupational adjustment. Many social studies experiences might

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

be reoriented in such a manner as to provide more information concerning occupations or to promote the development of more wholesome attitudes toward certain groups of occupations. "Community helpers" units in some primary grades now make valuable contributions in this respect. Sometimes units in the upper grades tend to emphasize things and processes and to overlook possible opportunities to learn about the people who use the things and carry on the processes. Units on coal or steel, for instance, provide an excellent opportunity to give attention to the many workers involved in these industries and to develop information about the manner in which they carry on their work.

In general, the objective of such experiences in the elementary grades should be the development of a "readiness" for making occupational choices. Expected outcomes might be: (a) the

recognition that all citizens of a democratic society are expected to be workers and therefore must select an occupation; (b) the recognition of the social values of all necessary work; (c) a familiarity with the different occupations followed by people in the pupil's own community; (d) an understanding of how different jobs affect individual and family living patterns; (e) an understanding of the relationship of individual interests and abilities to the types of activities involved in different jobs; and (f) some understanding of the individual pupil's own interests and abilities.

2. *Pupils should be given an opportunity to identify positively with individuals representing a variety of occupations.* Attitudes toward occupations are frequently a reflection of attitudes toward individuals. Parents of pupils or other persons from the school's community might be used as resource per-

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sons at appropriate times in order to give children an opportunity to become personally acquainted with individuals following a variety of occupations. Since teachers tend to come from middle-class groups, they probably should control their own tendencies to display attitudes that label some occupations as desirable and others as undesirable. The early development of emotionalized attitudes toward certain occupations tends to limit later choices.

3. *More effective use should be made of non-reading methods of giving youngsters information about occupations.* The development of large industries located in special areas of communities tends to restrict the opportunities of children to make firsthand observations of adults at work. Much of society's necessary work is now carried on in walled buildings or within fenced yards. In suburban bedroom communities many children have no opportunity to observe the work performed by their own mothers and fathers. Young people, therefore, find less opportunity to actually see how work is done by adults while at the same time the work being performed is becoming more complex. The schools should be concerned with the development of a rich fund of concrete experiences in observing adults at work and in carrying on activities that represent samplings of actual work experiences. Such a supply of sensory experiences will help youngsters to develop the ability to derive meaning from symbolized experiences such as those involved in listening, talking and reading. Schools should make more effective use of means of giving occupational information such as the following: planned work

experience programs; contrived work experience such as "work days"; role playing and dramatic play; relating class activities to appropriate occupations; providing planned opportunities for observing people at work on jobs; using sound movies, slides, etc.

4. *Parents should be directly involved in educational and occupational planning.* Studies of how young people determine their educational and occupational objectives reveal that parents play an important role in these decisions. Many such studies indicate that adolescents rely upon the advice of parents more than upon the help of teachers and counselors. Undoubtedly the attitudes of parents toward possible alternative choices, conveyed in many ways, have a more important effect in determining choices than even the adolescents are aware. It would seem wise, therefore, for the school to involve parents directly in important conferences concerning the plans of their students. Such an arrangement provides an opportunity to assist parents as well as students in arriving at sound decisions. A strategic time for an important conference of this type would seem to be just prior to or during the ninth grade when students in many secondary schools are expected to make decisions that influence the remainder of their educational experiences. The effectiveness of such planning conferences for adolescents will be increased if they have been preceded by a regularly conducted series of parent-teacher conferences during the elementary years.

A Basic Program

In summary, the following might be considered a desirable basic program for

the development of sound occupational adjustment:

1. *Elementary Grades* (1 thru 7 or 8)

(a) Appropriate emphasis, especially in social studies, on learning experiences that give children realistic and concrete knowledge of occupations followed in their own communities. Direct observation and dramatic play are especially suitable techniques.

(b) Learning experiences designed to give children an understanding of their own interests and abilities.

(c) Experiences that result in wholesome attitudes toward all necessary work and a readiness for making an occupational choice when the time comes to do so.

(d) Regular conferences of teachers and parents that will help both to develop a more complete understanding of individual children and the factors that influence their behavior.

2. *Upper Elementary or Junior High Grades* (7 through 9)

(a) Continuation of (a), (b) and (c) above.

(b) Emphasis in all classes upon exploratory values with a special attempt to relate the activities carried on in class to appropriate occupations. Development of courses offering an exploration of important fields of work such as industrial arts and general business.

(c) A special unit in the 8th or 9th grade intended to provide more specific and complete information about educational and occupational opportunities.

(d) A special unit designed to aid each student in developing an under-

standing of his own values, interests and abilities.

(e) Continuation of conferences with parents and scheduling of a major planning conference for teacher or counselor, parent and pupil during 8th or 9th grade.

3. *Senior High Grades* (10 through 12)

(a) Individual counseling at appropriate intervals concerning educational and occupational plans. Parents should be included in counseling conferences when that is desirable. At least one additional major planning conference should be held with the parents during the 11th or 12th grade.

(b) Continued emphasis in all classes upon the relationship of class activities to occupational opportunities. Provision of needed broad field courses in order to supplement those offered in junior high grades.

(c) Arrangement whereby appropriate courses can be used as try-out experiences by students who have made tentative decisions concerning occupational objectives.

(d) A work experience program through which students can be helped to secure exploratory and try-out experiences in an actual working situation.

(e) Vocational courses suitable to the school and the community through which students can develop skills that will enable them to secure beginning jobs.

(f) A special unit in the 11th or 12th grade in which students who need to do so can reconsider and revise their educational and occupational plans.

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