

Research and Vocational Development

Charles Galloway

THE world of work is undergoing drastic changes. Increasingly apparent is the fact that unskilled hands and unschooled minds are finding fewer and fewer jobs. Training and brain power are steadily replacing muscle and brawn. While job opportunities will continue to increase for young men and women who are educationally prepared, fewer and fewer occupations will be available to the unskilled and semiskilled who seek employment in this decade and in the decades to come.

Even though such a rapid shift in the nature of the labor market is an overwhelming problem for our society, the sheer numbers of youngsters seeking work will become an even greater problem. There will be over 25 million young workers entering the labor force in the Sixties, and several million others who will be unable to obtain jobs. Among the unemployed there will be dropouts, high school graduates, and college students.

Only recently have educators begun to admit that there should be a relationship between what is taught in school and vocational preparation. To be sure, secondary school programs have been associated with vocational training during this century, but only in a specialized way. Vocational education broadly conceived has long eluded us.

What promising experiments and researches are being conducted that pro-

vide some answers and set the stage for a better understanding of youth's difficulties in vocational development? Frankly, much of the research work in school systems, graduate schools, and research centers has been narrowly compartmentalized into subject matter designations (e.g., agriculture, home economics, industrial arts, business, etc.), or devoted to separate fields (e.g., clinical psychology, industrial psychology, occupational sociology, counseling). Of course the former breakdown relates peculiarly to formal schooling, while the latter may be associated with the behavioral disciplines. Yet regardless of where one looks, one becomes uneasy about the relationship between ongoing research and the difference such research makes in the occupational problems that youth faces. Perhaps one expects too much.

Recent Emphasis— Longitudinal Studies

Researchers have perennially focused on the accumulation of normative and descriptive data with the prediction and assessment of vocational satisfaction, success and choice representing the major effort. Moreover, there has been a plethora of researches devoted to occupational aptitudes, interests and attitudes.

However, many researchers are no longer satisfied with the static, moment-

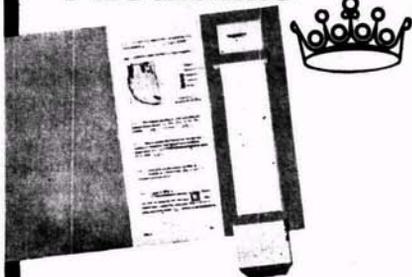
in-time event of vocational choice of youth, and newer emphases are emerging. Contemporary researchers are viewing vocational development as a developmental process that takes place during a span of time.

Indeed, youth matures vocationally as well as physically, emotionally and socially, and becomes involved in a series of longitudinal decisions that transpire from late childhood to adulthood. Thus, vocational maturity patterns are being traced, prevocational choices by youth are being studied, vocational positions in a total career pattern are being analyzed, and developmental life stages of occupational decision making are being researched.

All of the foregoing suggest that present day researchers and theorists are primarily interested, not only in the prediction of specific outcomes, but in understanding the environmental conditions and vocational life cycles that are currently evident. In the past it has been as if youth had no valid vocational behavior that was important enough to study until that magic point in time when youth was faced with an immediate academic or vocational choice. While such research emphases could readily be defended in the past, they represent anachronistic and inappropriate launching pads for the future. Therefore, one profound outlook in vocational research has been the new emphasis on longitudinal studies. Much of the promising research activity that is taking place today stems from novel research models and imaginative theory formulations. Such research and theory are simply replacing the older attempts of predicting specific vocational choices among youth. Several exemplars of research that are especially promising will be presented.

Super's efforts in researching voca-

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tional development are particularly noteworthy (7, 8). In the 20-year Career Pattern Study the emphasis centers on the distinction between the prediction of career pattern and occupational choice. A career pattern is a process that is associated with developmental tasks, implementation of a self-concept, and the developmental character of vocational behavior. Occupational choice suggests a narrow view of matchmaking between individual dispositions and occupational requisites. For example, some of the guidance programs in our high schools have attempted to match youth with jobs or aptitudes with occupations.

Even though these pairings have certain advantages for the employer and, perhaps, the student, such matchmaking overlooks the impelling fact that young people cannot be expected to remain with an occupation for a lifetime. For Super, such an approach overlooks the

vocational process of youth which usually proceeds along a predictable path of career development. An empirical test by Super and his associates of the vocational maturity of ninth grade boys provided usable indices of such maturity. Since this is a longitudinal study, there will be more data concerning these subjects in the years to come.

The Harvard Studies in Career Development, which were initiated by Tiedeman and his collaborators (9, 10, 11), are also longitudinal studies of vocational behavior. Tiedeman's major interest has been toward understanding the work history or career pattern of an individual which he theorizes is the fundamental criterion for studies on the vocational development of youth. In effect, heavy reliance has been placed on the relationship between the self-concept and an individual's history of work.

The nature of the self-concept has

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eluded many researchers and it can be understood why many studies by Tiedeman and his coworkers have been directed toward this end. That the vocational behavior of a youth can be predicted from his self-concept comes as no surprise to many of us. While the usefulness of this hypothetical construct is just beginning to receive the sort of attention it deserves in various aspects of education, many research problems remain. One example that plagues many researchers is the difference that may exist between the self concept and the self report.

An investigation into the self concepts of boys was initiated by O'Hara and Tiedeman (6) as these boys progressed through high school. The results suggested that interests and work values are modified from grade 9 through 12, and that an understanding of their abilities or aptitudes is poorly grasped by even

the most capable students. A quite recent research study by Montesano and Geist (5) compared another group of ninth and twelfth grade boys in their occupational decision making. While ninth grade boys rely to a greater degree than twelfth graders on interests and need satisfaction, an assessment of actual abilities was not seriously considered by either group. Further, a recent study by Gibbons (3) suggests that eighth graders possess a readiness for vocational planning and need definite assistance in developing accurate perceptions of their abilities since they are being forced to make prevocational choices. More research work should be forthcoming regarding the function of self concept or vocational identity in the career development of our youth.

There are other major investigations, e.g., those by Holland (4), Flanagan (2), and Tyler (12), to name a few. Their



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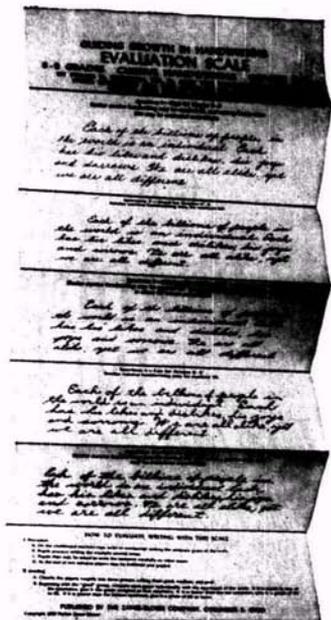
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work also is directed toward vocational development and choice. To review the findings and promising implications of their efforts would require more space than is available here; however, the inquiring reader is referred to the references at the end of this article. Also, Borow's (1) recent book, *Man in a World of Work*, has an excellent summary of the research mentioned above.

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Self-Understanding—Ohlsen

(Continued from page 241)

2. Orient young people to the sources of information and give them a chance to react to what they learn.

3. Use only those resources which you are qualified to use. For example, a test should not be given until the school employs someone who is qualified to use and interpret such a test. All too often teachers and counselors are expected to interpret tests which they are not qualified to interpret. Hence, pupils are either given inaccurate impressions of themselves or the experience is not meaningful—increased self-understanding is not achieved.

4. Have more respect for pupils' perception of themselves. Most students have a pretty accurate impression of how well they have done on a test.⁷ Also, encourage them to report their self-estimates prior to their receiving information. This method enables the information giver to identify errors in perception and helps him identify pupils' feelings that should be discussed.

5. Be very sensitive to cues which suggest that the pupil does not comprehend, or cannot accept, the information that is being given to him. Obviously, arguing with him does not produce increased

⁷ Merle M. Ohlsen, Richard E. Pearson and Paul A. Wurm. *Variables Related to Outcomes of Test Interpretation*. Cooperative Research Project No. S-043-64. Urbana: College of Education, University of Illinois, 1964.

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self-understanding. On the other hand, giving him a chance to ask questions concerning the material which he does not understand or to react emotionally to the material which he cannot accept may produce better self-understanding. If, for example, a counselor is to do this successfully while interpreting a test to a junior high school pupil, he must know a lot about junior high pupils in general, and this pupil in particular, and he must know the test he is interpreting.

6. Be wary lest you let general perceptions of a pupil color objective data. Ohlsen, Pearson and Wurm⁸ found that teachers react to pupils in terms of a general perceptual set and that overestimation and underestimation of mental ability are related to this general perceptual set.

⁸ *Ibid.*

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