

The high school faces

Vocational Guidance

VOCATIONAL guidance of high school students has always been a concern of the American high school, though the degree of concern and the kind of approach have varied.

In the 19th century it was usual to consider high school attendance as a prerequisite for college admission. This was true for those wishing to enter the ministry, law or other learned professions; thus, in essence, a high school education was part of the vocational guidance for the academically and financially able. The dropout was not considered a problem but a convenience for a frontier society in need of manual laborers, farm workers and small business men. The status of women of that day made no vocational guidance demands on the high school, for the majority of girls understood clearly their roles as homemakers.

With the advance of the early 20th century, under the leadership of Frank Parsons and his many disciples, vocational guidance emphasized: (a) helping the student to assess his strengths, limitations and interests; (b) studying the world of work; and (c) deciding on a vocational goal, so that an educational or

training program might be completed before employment was sought. Later, the studies of Ginzberg¹ and others revealed that realistic vocational choice did not usually take place until the young person was in his early twenties. By then, the average student certainly was out of high school or possibly graduated from college so that any fixed vocational plan of the high school period often resulted in a poorly placed and unhappy worker whose daily labor was anything but "love made visible." The Ginzberg theory, related to educational placement in the high school curriculum, endorsed systematic exploration in various academic areas and avocational interests throughout the elementary grades and especially in the junior high school.

Guidance counselors began to appear in greater numbers in the secondary schools by the middle of the 1940's. Too often these counselors were expected to assume more superhuman than practical educational-vocational guidance of all students. The counselor enthusiastically went about his vague task, with or without extensive preparation for his work and, generally, with no supervision or

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¹Eli Ginzberg and Associates. *Occupational Choice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1951.

evaluation of his efforts. Career Days became standardized, serving more as a public relations vehicle than for the dissemination of occupational information. Such programs were followed by hasty counseling to determine the uniqueness of individual differences and the values and interests of students in relation to levels of employment in vocational fields.

Sometimes the counselor's work was supported, usually at grade 9, by the assignment of a unit on vocations to an often reluctant civics teacher. This rather sterile unit on the "world of work" was personalized by the pseudo-scientific administration of an occupational interest inventory, a personality survey, or perhaps an intelligence test. The career notebook finalized the unit and from this point vocational guidance became an incidental function of the overworked counselor until the dropout was faced with an escape through marriage, the selective service, or a job for which he was ill-prepared, while other students were guided vocationally by other external influences and their own rate of maturity.

Fortunately, with the appearance of *The Counselor in the Changing World* by C. Gilbert Wrenn, a new look was directed at the many functions of the counselor and the elements of vocational guidance. Wrenn stated that vocational choice should be viewed not as an event but as a developmental process extending over a period of years, even to retirement. Roe, Tiedeman, Super, Holland and others, have research evidence that a student's vocational interest patterns evolve from childhood as a result of parental attitudes, peer values, the influence of teachers and other significant adults, activities and subjects pursued, and the general interaction with the environment in the development of the pupil's self-concept. Psychological and sociological factors in

vocational choice weigh as heavily, or perhaps more so, than the economic aspects of the world of work.

Ginzberg questions the total impact of the counselor and teachers on the student's educational-vocational goals in the light of the out-of-school influences, such as "family income, the community he (the pupil) is brought up in, the color of his skin, and even more factors."² Therefore, Ginzberg concludes that counseling should be more concerned with the "decision-making process" that affects youngsters in their educational choices while they are in school. A daily working relationship between counselor and teachers assures concerted support of the pupils' goal-setting efforts.

One adolescent, chronically at war within the classroom, defied parents and teachers in many ways. He refused to study and asserted his independence by choosing courses irrelevant to his abilities and interests. The teacher of diversified mechanics analyzed the situation and talked with the boy's counselor. After carefully laying the groundwork, the teacher helped the boy to be transferred from this basic class to a program in vocational drafting in a three-hour block of time. A member of the vocational advisory committee, vitally interested in youth, agreed to employ the boy for four hours a day after school. Through subsequent counseling, the lad enrolled in drafting in the junior college while he continued with his part-time work, and he now plans to enroll for his junior year at the state university. No amount of abstract counseling, separated from the reality of the classroom, could have reached this student as much as a teacher who

² Edward Landy and Paul A. Perry, editors. *Guidance in American Education: Background and Prospects*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.

cares and who was concerned enough about appropriate educational placement to incite a concerted team effort of significant adults on this boy's behalf.

Repeatedly, Dr. Seymour Wolfbein of the U. S. Department of Labor stresses the importance of keeping the learner in a maneuverable position so that his educational background helps him not only to secure an entry job, when it is needed, but enables him to proceed to better types of employment with further education and training. According to John W. Gardner in *Excellence*,³ "The future is necessarily hazardous for the individual who trains himself to do a specific job, receives an advanced degree for that line of work and believes that society owes him a living doing it." Today with the socioeconomic upheaval caused by automation and technological change, with resulting unemployment and unnecessary poverty, the school's position is not one of isolation. Consequently, new realizations are evident.

1. Teachers, as well as counselors, must search for the latest information on current and projected manpower requirements so that instructional programs may be related to manpower needs as well as to the professions. The traditional classical education will no longer be the sole curriculum since business, prevocational, and vocational education will be expanded to meet the demands of the increased youth population.

2. Administrators, teachers and counselors must learn new ways to communicate with each other. There is an increased need for school personnel to understand the unique differences among themselves and their potentialities to foster learning abilities and vocational maturity in students.

³ John W. Gardner. *Excellence*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1961.

3. School personnel will need to be cooperating more with agencies established to train dropouts, to provide work opportunities for students with financial problems, and with those agencies or public-spirited citizens who may give special support or treatment to boys and girls with difficult problems.

What can the high school do in this changing world to help young people develop their vocational maturity? Since new types of work will be created in terms of technological change, obviously to delineate the exact vocational worth of each subject would be folly, for such worth is reflected as a result of the:

Realistic self-concept of each student which enables him to understand himself and the world at large so that he may interpret subject matter as a result of personal insights.

Habits of attendance and punctuality which help to form daily patterns for work attitudes.

Values placed upon education and a personal identification with achievement of improved understandings.

In an aviation program, no words could measure the enthusiasm and improved self-concept of a group of boys who had enrolled in the sheet metal course, mainly a manipulative program, more through academic desperation than good planning. When the trade certificates were awarded by a member of the advisory committee on the completion of the program, the announcement was made that all of these graduates were invited to appear the next Monday morning for immediate employment at a large aviation plant. Every boy reported to work with a spirit of pride and self-confidence. Two of these boys now employed are talking of saving part of their wages in the hope that they may enter

the junior college at a later date. Within six months the principal of the aviation training center received word that fifty more boys, of this same caliber, would be employed when they completed the course. This information spread rapidly into 19 county high schools to spur many more boys to take a look at their own future goals.

A vocational course, unlike many academic subjects, may help to motivate the student because he can see its immediate value to his future life. Many times this awakened interest in the student triggers a broader curiosity overlapping into academic areas.

Who knows what impact class placement has on the values and the development of vocational maturity of boys and girls? Industrial surveys over the years have indicated that over 70 percent of persons losing their jobs do so not because of lack of job skills but because of the absence of social acceptance of others and the ability to exchange ideas.

In one large high school, Al, the son of a prominent citizen, known to be extremely intolerant, enrolled in chorus. Another boy, Ronnie, although a likeable lad, had been conditioned to scorn cultures different from his own and had openly boasted of his contempt for classmates of other races. Possessing good voices and enthusiasm for music, Ronnie and Al participated not only in the formal music of the classroom but came back two evenings each week to sing in a large group chorus preparatory to the presentation of the school pageant. At the end of the semester, the perceptive music teacher commented, "Ronnie, it was no secret that you had nothing but contempt for Al when you came into this class. Now you're inseparable. What changed your feelings for him?" Ronnie flushed slightly and blurted out, "Gee,

Mrs. Newell, how can you hate a guy when you sit in the same section singing together for a whole year?"

Grant Venn has estimated that "less than 6 percent of high school graduates complete a program of occupational preparation at the present time."⁴ Yet, according to the January 1963 *Economic Report to the President*, non-college graduates constitute about 80 percent of new entrants into the labor force.

The American high school has a continuing commitment to assess the abilities of students who should be encouraged to complete a college education. However, the charge is clear that work training programs, business education courses based on electronic machines, and industrial courses must be expanded and improved. Administrators, curriculum leaders, teachers and counselors must work with people in government and industry who can identify programs that will help young people to raise their goals by seeing occupational implications in daily experiences and in school.

The high school faces the issue of vocational guidance when it accepts the fact that personal purpose, forced into focus by individual achievement, brings the learner to the threshold of vocational choice. Flexibility in scheduling each student in a program in which he has the possibility for success and greater self acceptance is the keystone to effective vocational guidance. Counselors, teachers, parents and community leaders have unique but equally important contributions to make in helping each student to have more "teachable moments" when learning experiences assume important life meanings.

⁴ Grant Venn. *Man, Education, and Work: Postsecondary Vocational and Technical Education*. Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1964.

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