

New Recommendations for Vocational Education

N.E.A. COMMITTEE

IN 1932 the Department of Secondary School Principals of the National Education Association appointed a Committee on Orientation* to make a study of the "issues" and "special functions" of secondary education. For the past three years the twelve well-known educators who compose this committee have been engaged in the study. The first part of their report, *Functions of Secondary Education*, was published in 1936 as Bulletin No. 59 of the Department. The second, *Special Functions of Secondary Education*, will be released in January, 1937.

The committee has brought to light much new information with which all persons engaged in secondary-school work should be familiar. For the first time an attempt has been made to point out the important "issues" which vitally affect secondary-school procedures. Not only has the committee clearly defined the great "issues" but it has indicated the steps which seem most appropriate in meeting them. It presents an impartial analysis of each, the arguments on both sides of the alternatives, and recommendations for both

individual schools and the profession as a whole to consider in their solution. The work should result in improvement of secondary education in America.

There are ten of the great "issues"

which seem to the committee to be of primary importance. Issue V is concerned with vocational education in the secondary schools. It is stated as follows:

Shall secondary education include vocational training, or shall it be restricted to general education?

By an "issue" is meant a conflict of theory with theory, of theory with practice, or of practice with practice. "Vocational education" is used by the Committee on Orientation to indicate all activities directed by schools for the specific

purpose of preparing for successful participation in different fields of service. "General education" is used to refer to all other activities directed by the school, namely, those which do not have reference to the particular field of service in which individuals hope to engage.

THE CASE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

It can hardly be disputed that every individual should be educated somewhere

■ *No more significant statement of the place of vocational education in the total secondary program has appeared than the report of the Committee on Orientation of the N.E.A. Department of Secondary School Principals. Twelve distinguished educators approve vocational education, declare arguments against it to be unsound, favor its beginning in the senior high school, and suggest outline specifications for a dynamic program. The accompanying statement was prepared from the Committee report by the Department's Committee on Planning—Thomas H. Briggs, Rudolph D. Lindquist, W. C. Reavis, John H. Tyson, Francis L. Bacon, Chairman.*

*For personnel of this committee see page 280.

for successful participation in a particular field of service. Such participation is desirable no less for one's personal happiness than for the best interests of society. Training is required in every vocation, and such training is a charge that society ultimately must pay in one way or another. No one can dispute that it should be given adequately, effectively, and economically. The real "issue" is whether training for occupations below the expert and professional level should be provided in part by secondary schools or under their direction, or whether such training should be provided entirely by non-school agencies, leaving the individual and this agency jointly responsible to society for its effectiveness.

No longer can secondary education in the United States be considered primarily as training youth for leadership; more and more in the future it must attempt the promotion of talents, whatever they may be, of every individual. Educators have not waited for the issue of vocational education to be settled according to approved principles of education, but have already enrolled more than one million boys, girls, and adults in specialized vocational courses. That there is a need for vocational training is undisputed. Those who favor the high school giving the needed training, point to the fact that no other agency is meeting the need, and believe that it should assume the responsibility.

It is further argued that the earlier an individual selects some vocational interest, the greater effort he will make in all his studies. It is becoming increasingly difficult for young people to secure apprenticeship training. Public control of vocational training, it is argued, is necessary to safeguard the interests of society, and especially those of young workers

who are seeking to establish themselves in occupations. Another argument is that of the "consumer value" of vocational education—that the student acquires valuable information and standards of appreciation from the study of a vocation even though he does not follow this particular calling when he leaves school.

THE CASE AGAINST VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The arguments against vocational education in the secondary school arise from a feeling that general education is more important at the high school level, or are based upon the criticism resulting from defects in programs of vocational education. In support of the first of these objections, it is maintained that the primary obligation of the school is to provide a program that insures the social, cultural, moral, civic, political and economic education of each and every citizen. Nothing should be allowed to impair this program.

The chief objections growing out of the defects in programs of vocational education are: (1) that early selection of a vocation leads to maladjustment of the individual; (2) that the confusion and uncertainty as to what should be included in the secondary-school curriculum in vocational education indicates that the secondary school is not the proper place for this kind of training; (3) that experiments in organizing secondary-school curricula with vocational objectives have not proved successful; (4) that change in industry is so rapid that the training young people receive will be out of date by the time they have an opportunity to use it; and (5) that many of the industries prefer to give this training themselves to youth with a good foundation in general education.

THE RESOLUTION OF THE ISSUE

It is the arguments against vocational education that seem to the committee to be unsound. The idea, for example, that since life consists of more than one's work, these other things should have the right of way in education over everything that pertains to work, is thoroughly fallacious. Work should have its due place, and this place is not to be postponed until everything else has been cared for. To do this not only would deprive the great majority of youth of vocational training, but it would deprive them of the contribution which vocational education can make to their social, moral, civic, economic, and cultural education.

It is true that the present provision for vocational education, which is quite recent in most schools, does not meet the larger responsibilities of vocational education as we have conceived them. For the most part it complacently accepts the *status quo*, and endeavors to adjust students to its demands. As a basis for a more dynamic vocational program it is proposed that an extended survey be made of the major needs and values of our society, and of the resources, equipment, personnel, and technology available to meet them.

Those who doubt that the secondary schools can provide an effective program of vocational education should view the defects in the present program in the light of the rapid and encouraging progress made since its beginning. In the senior high school, vocational education, as previously defined, may begin. In the light of the present retention of pupils in school, it is hardly necessary to attempt differentiated education for the various major fields of service below this point.

SPECIFICATIONS OF A DYNAMIC PROGRAM

The defects indicated by critics of vocational education in the secondary school actually suggest the specifications for a dynamic program. What should be the nature of this program? A summary of its outstanding characteristics has been made by Arthur E. Morgan:

The nature of an adequate program of vocational education in a democratic society demands that the program be an integral part of the secondary period of school. Such a program of vocational education:

1. Must be treated not as an isolated problem but as an inseparable part of the unified and integrated development of the entire personality.
2. Must be preceded by intelligent counseling.
3. Must have a broad, general base as well as a sharp focus on a particular job. Thus, among other things, the adequate program must promote imagination, persistence, and initiative, which are imperative for developing new opportunities. Hundreds of new callings are in their infancy waiting to be developed.
4. Must be determined by the individual's needs and those of society and not by caprice of economic fortune.
4. Must be under public supervision and control, a basic principle established in Federal aid to education. . . .
6. Must create a picture of a better social and economic order wherein our enormous actual and potential wealth will be used for the full development of the whole people.
7. Must provide better training for work than schools formerly did, because schools are holding boys and girls longer from entering industry.
8. Must give consideration to intelligent consumption.

To these recommendations the Committee on Orientation would append the following:

1. The attention of students should be directed continually to the social function of their fields of service.

2. The individualistic, competitive ideal of "success" should be questioned, and, if possible, eliminated.
3. Students should be prepared for a shock when their social ideals encounter present practice.
4. The history and present status of wage earners should receive more attention than it does at present.
5. In specialized vocational education, insofar as the capacity of the learner permits, his study should include the fundamental problems of the whole field of service in which he plans to engage.
6. With this general orientation he should map out a tentative program for himself within this field of service, and foresee as far as possible what skills, information, understandings, techniques, abilities, habits, attitudes, and ideals will enable him to carry out this program. At this point the need for an adequate guidance program is clearly indicated.
7. Training in skills of all pupils who do not plan to enter higher institutions should be provided by the secondary school and not by other agencies in at least the amount necessary for successful entrance upon a vocation.
8. Training in skills and information should not be allowed to overshadow, in any case, the larger responsibilities of vocational education.
9. Even in very small schools something may be done to recognize, encourage, promote, and utilize the vocational interests of pupils.
10. No program of secondary education should be regarded as acceptable unless it makes some provision for specialized vocational education and for the vocational aspects of general education previously discussed.
11. Junior colleges should recognize the same general obligations toward vocational education as are herein proposed for the senior high schools, with the additional provision that they should normally offer training for occupations of a more expert level, such as pharmacy, journalism, tool-making, and the like.
12. Whenever it is possible, secondary schools should make some provision for adult workers to extend their vocational education or to transfer to other fields of service.
13. A vast extension of the present co-operation between the school and the community will be necessary before it will be possible to offer pupils intelligently planned and supervised training in the wide variety of vocational skills which are necessary to carry on the work of our society.
14. The educational program should follow up and assist, insofar as it can, the initial adjustment of the pupil in his chosen field of service.
15. Secondary education should recognize the fundamental importance of vocational education as an agency for the betterment of society, and as a magnificent instrument for reaching the social objectives of the best of the conventional school subjects.