

OCCUPATIONS

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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR LIVING

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In education for living, as contrasted with education for making money, Mr. Borsodi sees a great opportunity for increasing economic security and human happiness. "Education for living" means, among other things, training in the skills and arts of home production for home consumption, so that men and women will be able to provide for themselves what they need or desire for their own use and enjoyment, from food and clothing to music and drama. This would lessen their dependence on impermanent jobs and give them full-time occupation. Mr. Borsodi, in this article, applies to the vocational problem the philosophy expressed in his well known book called Flight from the City.

AN ECONOMIC system based upon industrial production can function only through the division and subdivision of labor. The more elaborate such a system, the more dependent it becomes upon the division of labor into highly specialized occupations. With such a system, all products tend to uniformity; all processes and machinery are standardized; all work is specialized. And each worker tends to become a specialist. In order that the system may function successfully, it is obvious that it must be at all times adequately supplied with workers for the vocations in which they specialize.

Naturally enough, in our factory-dominated civilization, when we first came to recognize this as a task for education, we tended to identify preparation of men

and women for their occupations and vocations with preparation for the specialized jobs, trades, and professions upon which they would have to depend for the money with which to buy what the industrial order had to supply them. Vocational education tended, therefore, to become first of all education in how to earn money, and to furnish a sharp contrast, with its "practical" training, to the cultural and non-economic training of academic education.

II

Unfortunately the industrial order is not a static one. If it were, the problem of training people for their vocations and the problem of adjusting them to their occupations would be relatively simple. Inventions, both mechanical and method-

ological, come and go, and production and distribution, commerce and finance, public and professional service, change with them.

Styles also change—styles in clothing, in foods, in furnishings, in housing—and the demands for the products of various industries come and go with these changes in fashion and custom. Each new product, and each new method of manufacturing and distributing it, brings new factories, new businesses, and new professions into existence. These grow and prosper as the demand for the new products and new services rises, and when the demand begins to decrease, they begin to shrink, and if the demand shifts to something still newer, they tend to disappear altogether—and the specialized occupations which came into existence with them disappear with them.

The nation not so long ago furnished employment to a great army of wheelwrights, blacksmiths, saddlers, liverymen, veterinarians. When the automobile came in, these workers were not only unemployed—their educations, their skills, their experiences were rendered valueless. The automobile, it is true, created an enormous demand for workers differently trained—for automobile mechanics, automobile engineers, automobile salesmen, not to mention the "specialists" in the collateral new industries of petroleum and rubber. If some new invention—the aeroplane, perhaps,—reduces the demand for automobiles as the automobile reduced the demand for horses and wagons, then the specialized occupations which came into existence with the automobile will in turn tend to disappear.

Change (or progress, if you prefer that term) thus creates a problem in re-training and re-adjusting people—a much more difficult task today when nearly everybody is trained to operate a narrowly

specialized machine than it used to be in the pre-industrialized past when a high degree of versatility was essential to survival.

As the industrial system becomes more and more complex, as it becomes more and more specialized in the interests of efficiency, the magnitude and the nature of these occupational shifts tend to become greater and more frequent—the shifts may be not only from one job to another, but from one industry to some other industry, and from one section of the country to another section. Industry itself has recognized this difficulty, and efficiency engineers try to offset the losses thus caused by reducing every job to a dead level of simplicity so that the workers for any job may be trained almost overnight. But the more the engineers simplify operative processes, the more they complicate the technical and administrative processes. In order to be able to produce with masses of robots at the bottom of the industrial hierarchy, industrialism finds itself forced to utilize more and more intensively specialized technicians and administrators at the top.

That American education has recognized the importance of this problem, and that those interested in vocational education and guidance have boldly faced the difficulties of occupational training by developing methods adequate to its magnitude, is all to the good. But it is not enough. Unless society is to be permitted to shake itself to pieces—emotionally as well as economically—by an ever-growing dependence upon industrialism, educators must not permit vocational education to be confined to job-securing, money-making subjects.

III

The present vocational problem has been rendered more difficult by what

might be called a psychological by-product of industrialism.

In pre-industrial societies, the task of choosing among the various occupations was made easy by the fact that everybody in the community, including each youth making a vocational selection, was familiar with nearly all the existing trades, crafts, and professions. Once such a selection was made, the absence of change, or the slowness of change, made it easy to remain in the selected occupation. In addition, the fact that the overwhelming majority of occupations were practiced along with farming and with domestic crafts of all kinds greatly reduced the dependence upon the specialized occupation. It was the custom, therefore, to stay with the occupation which had been inherited or which had been selected because of some interest or aptitude.

Today, the selection once made, no such stable conditions, either social or economic, support the selection. On the contrary, to change occupations from time to time seems more natural than not to change.

Thus to the vast numbers who need re-education from time to time because of the fickleness of industry must be added the armies needing re-education because of the fickleness of their own wills and inclinations. What manifests itself as labor turnover at the bottom of industry—the movement of the worker from job to job in search of the better paying job and the elusive more satisfying job—is duplicated by the office and professional workers ever seeking larger incomes and more interesting work. In an industrial order, the numbers seeking new occupations because they are unemployed are probably no greater than those seeking new occupations because they are bored of the work in which they are already engaged.

Boredom, that inescapable concomitant of non-creative and repetitive work, enormously adds to the size of the problem with which vocational education is confronted.

Thus far, however, we have assumed that the identity of occupational and money-making employment was absolute. But in the actual world of today, no such identity exists. Enormous numbers of people still support themselves in whole or in part by work for which they receive no money—by producing things and services which they need or desire for their own use and for the use of their own families. The entire time of millions of homemakers and a part of the time of every man and woman is still devoted to occupations in which they sew and knit, cook and preserve, farm and garden for their own consumption.

"One of the greatest population movements of centuries is taking place in America today," says a bulletin of the New York State College of Agriculture.¹ "City people are moving to the country at the rate of over two million per year. The interesting thing about this new 'back-to-the-land' movement is that most of these people are not locating on large farms; they are becoming part-time farmers or rural residents. That is, they are living in the country and going back and forth to their jobs in the city." These people support themselves, so to speak, by two occupations—one, a money-making occupation, and the other a varied, productive occupation in which they produce for their own use.

This is a fact which, it seems to me, we should not ignore, partly because my studies indicate that even in industrialized America nearly 40 per cent of all

¹ *Is It Cheaper to Live in the Country?* By Kenneth Hood. Bulletin 63, April 1934, New York State College of Agriculture, Ithaca.

the wealth produced each year is still produced for use and consumption at home and only 60 per cent produced in industry by those engaged in "gainful occupations," but mainly because what I like to call domestic production furnishes the only natural alternative to the insecurities and instabilities of employment and money-making in our industrialized society.

The greater the danger that my job or my profession may disappear, the more important it becomes that I should have some secure alternative method of producing what those dependent upon me need in order to live.

Re-education for another money-making job is not enough. In the race between the inventors, who are forever changing the jobs, and the educators who are trying to perfect methods of re-training people for the new jobs, the educators are inevitably going to lag behind. They cannot avoid doing so since, in the very nature of things, they cannot prepare in advance for what the inventors have not yet invented.

A very important choice between two sets of values has therefore to be made. Either the interests of the industrial order, with its gospel of change, must be placed before all other values, or the interests of human beings must be put first. If the decision is that the progress and prosperity of industry is most important—and this is the choice which it seems to me America has thus far made—some mass method of bridging this gap and of supporting people while education catches up with change is obviously essential. Unemployment insurance, which is a measure for social support of people who are rendered idle by industrial and economic change, is the logical corollary of an economic system dominated by the needs of industry.

But if the choice favors the happiness

of the people and the decision is that the cultivation of the good life is more important than the progress of industry, then the education of people to support themselves regardless of what happens to their money-making jobs is essential. This kind of education I have called education for living, in contrast with education for money-making.

The training of the men and women of America who are either already in part supporting themselves by home production, and of the millions who would like to do so, constitutes in my opinion a great opportunity and a great challenge to those interested in occupational education.

IV

Teaching people to live in homes which they themselves care for; to live in the country, amid growing things, on land which they can cultivate for themselves; to bake and preserve; to sew and knit; to spin and weave; to work in clay and leather and wood and iron and copper, and to produce in these crafts things for their own use and enjoyment; above all, to sing and dance, to compose and recite, to read and converse so that they may amuse and entertain themselves—these seem to me the cardinal features of education for living. Varied as these subjects are, they are alike in that, thus taught, they would all aim at training people to an "occupation" in which they produced what they needed or desired for their own use and consumption, in contrast with producing them for sale to an impersonal social market.

Every one of these subjects is being taught—for money-making purposes, however—in our schools today. We have schools of agriculture, in which farmers are taught how to specialize in the commercial production of wheat, of apples,

of milk, of cabbage. Why shouldn't we seriously undertake to teach the millions of part-time farmers and the millions of backyard gardeners and poultry keepers how to obtain the maximum return, both in quality and in quantity, from this work of theirs?

We have professional and vocational schools for architects and engineers, but the courses given are designed to teach them how to make money building monumental works—churches and skyscrapers, bridges and factories. Why shouldn't people be able to go to schools where they can learn how to design homes for themselves, to install running water, to take care of modern electrical appliances?

All the technical knowledge needed for spinning, dyeing, and weaving, for designing and sewing, and doing all these things efficiently, is now available and being taught to those who intend to earn money in these occupations. Why shouldn't this knowledge be made available to those who could use it to produce honest, beautiful fabrics and garments for their own use?

Finally, why shouldn't we approach the study of singing and music, of drama and dancing, as arts to be practiced for their own sake and for the entertainment which would be afforded to people in our own homes, instead of almost exclusively as something to be learned for gainful purposes or as something to be enjoyed as spectators of professional entertainers?

The more people are led to play spontaneously, participating actively in music and dancing, instead of being mere passive onlookers; the more they are taught how to cook and sew and garden effectively; the more they are helped in the practical problems of what kind of equipment to buy, in securing the supplies and material which they need, in buying land and in building and remodeling their homes; the more aid they are given in solving the problem of applying new methods and new machines to the old arts and handicrafts—the less dependent will they be upon their money-making jobs, and the less will they surrender themselves as hostages to the fortunes of an unstable industrial order.



UNSEEN BLUSHERS

Adult education should perform the necessary task of discovering the unsatisfied needs and wants of adult life. It is not only true that many a flower is born to blush unseen, but many an interest and many a power in individuals is fated to remain unreleased unless opportunity is given for their discovery and liberation. The movement of adult education is essentially one of freeing the latent capacities of individuals so that they may function for the happiness of individuals and the welfare of society.

—HARRY A. OVERSTREET