

Social Work and Vocational Guidance

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VOCATIONAL guidance would make much more rapid progress and its accomplishments would be much more vital if it were regarded as social work rather than as education. Such recognition would, of course, be in the nature of a return to the original conception of it as held by a social worker, Frank Parsons. In Boston in 1908, the first vocational guidance service was established by Parsons and other social workers. Vocational guidance has now quite generally come under the domination of educators, not through any recognition of a common philosophy underlying both education and vocational guidance, but rather because of a number of superficial factors.

The chief justification for considering vocational guidance a division of the field of education is found in the revised *Principles and Practice of Vocational Gui-*

dance of the National Vocational Guidance Association: "As preparation for an occupation involves decision in the choice of studies, choice of curricula and the choice of schools and colleges, it becomes evident that educational guidance must be considered equally with vocational guidance." In the writer's opinion there are other decisions connected with occupational adjustment equally important, and more numerous, in the majority of which the social worker is better equipped by training and experience to aid the client than the teacher, and because of which it is more logical to consider vocational guidance a division of the field of social work than of the field of education.

Another justification, frequently advanced, is that the schools come into contact with more children than do social agencies. However, this is merely a mat-

as social case work. Vocational guidance is also implied in the other three main techniques of social work, group work, community organization, and social research. However, the vocational counselor takes over so many more of the functions of the case worker than he does of the group worker or community organizer that it is quite valid to say that the vocational counselor is the case worker in industry, just as the medical social worker is the case worker in medicine and the probation officer is the case worker in delinquency and crime. The basic principles of social case work are the same whether one applies them to the problems of family disorganization and calls the result "family case work" or to medicine and calls it "medical social work" or to delinquency and calls it "probation."

The various schools of social work offer informational courses on problems and institutions in the fields of medicine, psychiatry, delinquency, and the like. Most of the schools of social work treat vocational guidance in the same way. At the Atlanta School of Social Work we have felt so keenly that vocational guidance was simply the technique of case work applied to the individual in industry that for some time we have offered a course on vocational guidance information similar to those in medicine and psychiatry. This is as far as we go in separating vocational guidance from generic case work.

III

It has always been true, and is now true, that social workers, individually and in groups, have taken the lead in improving social and economic conditions. Professional social work grew out of the need for specialists who could solve the problems of an increasing number of

people unable to meet the requirements of a society which was rapidly becoming more complex, especially with reference to occupations. Social workers have not willingly given over the control of vocational guidance to educational authorities. The field was preempted by the public school and university men. During the past two or three years there has been a very definite swing back to operation of vocational guidance by social workers. Social workers did not realize how academic had become the operation of vocational guidance by the school. The test came during the depression. Because vocational advice and guidance must be realistic, social workers have been forced to take the matter, where they could, into their own hands.

It is quite logical that the first type of social agency to do this should be that working with minority groups against whom there is most discrimination in industry and with whom the problems of placement and adjustment are most complex and difficult. In February, 1935 a vocational adjustment department was established in the Cleveland Jewish Social Service Bureau, and a new employment guidance service was added to the Jewish Community Center of Detroit and to the United Business Service of Pittsburgh, affiliated with the Jewish Federation of that city. It is significant that the latest volume of "The Job Analysis Series," sponsored by the American Association of Social Workers and financed by the Russell Sage Foundation, is entitled *Vocational Guidance in Action*. It is written by John A. Fitch, a teacher at the New York School of Social Work.

Because of the stereotyped thinking of those in control of education in America it would be difficult, at the present time, to make education over to serve individual needs. But if vocational counselors

considered themselves part of the profession of social work rather than of teaching, they might bring about a change. The cause of vocational guidance would be advanced immeasurably if the National Vocational Guidance Association would promote the organization of branches by social workers rather than by teachers. There is no implication here that the National Vocational Guidance Association is the last word in vocational guidance or that it has not itself become stereotyped in its own ideology. There are probably ten times as many vocational counselors attending national and state teachers' meetings as attend national or state conferences on social work. The situation should be just the other way around.

Because a counselor is located at a public school and because the local board of education pays his or her salary is no reason why he or she should allow the public school system to browbeat him or her into becoming a part of the teaching profession when in many cases the counselor knows better.

From a purely tactical point of view it might be wise for those who are most interested in the extension of vocational guidance to give attention to the matter of social work training of vocational counselors, since under the government social security program intelligent placement takes on great importance. Judging from recent indications, where political influence has been reduced to a minimum, placement officials are more apt to be drawn from the field of social work than from the field of education. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that national and local security officials who have done any hiring have had the opportunity of evaluating social work through the accomplishments of the many social workers employed by the government in

the administration of emergency relief.

Although we recognize that vocational guidance is concerned with the individual, the problems which are pressing most seriously for solution are those which affect the masses of people, such as unemployment and low wages. This does not mean, however, that we should go to the other extreme and neglect individualization entirely nor even give the most attention to mass rather than individual analysis. We disagree with Boring when he says, "Vocational guidance should change its emphasis from individual analysis and cultural anarchism to social analysis and a culture that will dull the edge of a social individualism."¹ Boring's complaint should not be based upon the difference between the individual and the mass approach, but rather upon the school's lack of concern with mass problems outside of school, such as unemployment and low wages. The average teacher is neither concerned with individualization of the pupil nor with his adjustment to the larger social life. What vocational guidance needs is a healthy and correct balance between individual and social analysis.

It must be realized that the maladjustment of many people who are now being served by social and especially public agencies, is due not to any deficiency in themselves but to general economic maladjustment which, if rectified, would benefit not only one individual but also great masses of people. But this is not all there is to social work, and the recognition of the importance of general conditions is not all that there is to vocational guidance. We must not go from one extreme to the other. However, the social worker does concern himself

¹ Boring, F. W., "Whither Vocational Guidance?" *Social Work Today*, December, 1935. Vol. III, No. 3.

ter of convenience and has no bearing on the question as to whether the professional equipment of the teacher for vocational guidance is better than that of the social worker. The mere stationing of a vocational counselor at a public school because of propinquity does not make of a counselor a member of the teaching profession and does not put vocational guidance in the field of education any more than the stationing of a nurse at a public school makes her a teacher or nursing a part of the field of education. A vocational counselor, a nurse, or a physician, whether stationed at a school full time or part time, is a specialist in a profession entirely apart from that of school teaching, and is only located at the school for convenience.

A third justification not often expressed but undoubtedly playing a definite part in causing many people to consider vocational guidance a part of the field of education, is the fact that the salaries of most vocational counselors are paid by public schools. Still another justification in the minds of unthinking people is the fact that most liberal arts colleges and normal schools offer lecture courses labeled "Vocational Guidance" or even degrees in vocational guidance.

II

Social workers are in a much better position than teachers to understand the real needs of vocational guidance clients. Teachers can withdraw from the pressing demands of the world about them with less criticism than social workers. In large measure they have been academicians living in a world of intellect, removed from the realities of life. Most of them have never come into immediate contact with industry and trade. The teacher is interested in a curriculum; the social worker in the individual.

Vocational guidance has always been and still is a sideline with the schools. Practically all of the funds of the schools are spent on the maintenance and operation of the educational functions and only a small amount on vocational guidance. On the other hand vocational guidance, although not labeled as such, has always been a large part of the task of the social worker, especially the case worker. The primary problems of his clients have been economic maladjustments. Even when the case worker extends financial assistance he advises with the client concerning the best method by which the latter can again become self-supporting or can better an inadequate income. The social worker sees life as an organic whole. He is supposed to make all kinds of adjustments, and a satisfactory economic adjustment is not the least important.

By his very training a social worker is better able than a teacher to understand the unfavorable effect which an unsatisfactory vocational adjustment has upon the morale of an individual. He is trained to teach his clients their relationship not only to members of their own family but to other families and to society in general. The social worker is taught to keep his client away from danger spots—physical, moral, social, educational, financial, and even civic. Only social workers receive definite training for individual counseling. The social worker is much less open to attack than are school men who are criticized for "seeing to it that culture is not being sacrificed to the exigencies of a mass of people who want education which will get them jobs." All these techniques and points of view especially adapt the social worker to vocational counseling.

Vocational guidance belongs chiefly in that specialized area of social work known

with two groups of problems rarely touched by the teacher, namely, those concerning the individual and those concerning society at large. That the social worker should take this point of view is not surprising because he is only living up to the definition of social work, "the adjustment of the individual to his environment and, conversely, the adjustment of the environment to the individual."

IV

If it is difficult to individualize vocational guidance when the whole population is facing so many general problems, how much more difficult must it be to individualize the vocational guidance of the Negro when the entire Negro race faces a greater number of general problems than does the majority group. In the case of the Negro, it is almost a joke to talk about applying the principles of vocational analysis, to use such phrases as development of the whole individual, integrated personality, physical and psychological characteristics, educational qualifications and aptitudes, and individual tests and measurements, when only the great mass of unskilled jobs are open to Negroes.

We have never seen a vocational counselor in the employ of a public school system (and this is where the majority of counselors are now employed) who did more than try to find his Negro clients jobs in local industries no matter how limited were the occupational opportunities for Negroes. We have yet to see a counselor who has the desire or courage to try to change the local unfavorable race relations in order to provide a wider range of occupational opportunities for Negroes. Like most other government employes the counselors fear political chastisement if they show any concern for the Negro problem. Undoubtedly if the

Negro possessed the ballot in the South these conditions would be greatly improved. The only attention to this problem is being given by social workers rather than educators. The National Urban League recognized this situation long ago and for a number of years has conducted an annual vocational guidance campaign in which it puts chief emphasis on the removal of the general handicaps operating upon the Negro in industry.

The vocational counselor among Negroes has certain problems to face which, on the surface, seem to have their source not so much in unsatisfactory race relations as in the social history of the Negro. His Negro client frequently does not aspire to enter occupational fields which are open to him. His Negro client is quickly discouraged. This makes it difficult to obtain the same cooperation for intelligent planning and perseverance in treatment as are available to the counselor working among white people. These idiosyncrasies of the Negro client, however, are easily understood; they are grounded in the Negro's past experiences. His horizon is limited to the few occupations in which he has seen other Negroes working. Because of bad treatment in his general environment he is inclined to believe the worst about the Negro's treatment in branches of industry with which he is not familiar. He has seen members of his race intimidated by workmen of other races to prevent them from seeking placement in new jobs which were open to them. The vocational counselor among Negroes has to supply not only occupational information, but morale, stamina, and certain other psychological forces to an extent which is not demanded of a vocational counselor among white people.

It did not take the depression, however, to make clear to social workers the

special problems of vocational guidance among Negroes. The traditional tendency of society to keep Negroes at the bottom of the economic scale where wages are the lowest and jobs are the most hazardous has always made the task of the social worker among Negroes more arduous. The depression has only increased the problem and intensified the task. Consequently the intelligent social worker among Negroes has had to apply individualization to the principles of vocational guidance more than workers of any other racial group.

This situation is complicated and aggravated by the fact that while the vocational counselor is a *rara avis* in schools in general and especially in the South, yet he is an infinitely rarer bird in the Negro schools. This results from the attitude of a large section of the South which holds that anything other than the mere essentials of education is a luxury

in the Negro public schools. It is all the more serious there because there are many more Negroes in southern public schools than in the mixed schools of the North.

All of this places a great responsibility upon two classes of people—upon social workers among Negroes, and upon teachers in the private schools for Negroes in the South. To the solution of these problems more attention is being given now and more actual work is being done by social workers than by educators. The latter discuss them occasionally in their annual state conventions but the former are actually striving to make satisfactory vocational adjustments for their clients every day of their lives. If, then, it is important for the white vocational counselor to be something of a social worker, it is ever so much more important for the Negro counselor to have a social work background.

A National Personnel Bureau

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VOCATIONAL guidance procedure among Negroes is fraught with facts and opinions which are paradoxical and conflicting. For instance, the vocational life of approximately three-fourths of all Negro college graduates has been along the line of professional activity. This is an excessive concentration to the exclusion of other choices which ought to attract a larger number of Negro college graduates. But while we still need more physicians, more teachers, more so-

cial workers, and more lawyers; we need too, a wider range of vocational opportunities. A vast majority of Negroes have chosen the professions because the racial pattern of success suggested them as sure avenues to economic and social livelihood. Yet there ought to be more trained mechanics, more accountants, more experts in marketing and advertising, and greater concentration on scientific occupations requiring scientific training. Authorities are continuing to place emphasis upon

the necessity for college training for Negroes. Negro colleges are being operated on a higher scale, more attention is being paid to their personnel and physical equipment, and larger endowments are being raised to maintain them at the level of approved standards. Yet even in normal times, we do not find employment for the graduates they are turning out yearly.

Good vocational guidance procedure takes into consideration the capacity of an individual to succeed in a given line of work. Indeed the talents of a student and his psychological and health ratings determine to a great degree the direction of his training. But Negroes who have the aptitude, and all personal requirements to succeed in highly specialized occupations (insofar as it is possible to determine success in advance of achievement), are advised to prepare for those callings which from past history are the so-called "Negro jobs."

A factor to be considered in selecting occupations is the social and economic trends that suggest which vocations are likely to offer satisfactory opportunity for employment. One notes today, for instance, that with the advance in scientific management and technological production, there is a trend away from productive to distributive and service occupations. There has been an increase in the number of persons working with other people in the distribution of goods, and a decrease in the number of persons making goods. As a consequence, we need workers who can sell, advertise, market, and distribute commodities. In other words, the fields which in the past have offered the smallest opportunity for Negroes, are those which now give evidence of requiring the largest number of workers.

Superior classroom performance is recognized by rewards in the form of

employment, but such recognition is denied Negroes. For them there is no comparable reward or incentive for superior scholarship. The doors of employment in places of business conducted by the men who sit on boards of Negro educational institutions, and who as interracialists advocate equal opportunity for Negroes, are closed even to the superior Negro student. Thus, while instructors are encouraging Negroes to high scholastic performance, the rewards which ordinarily obtain from such performance negate the advice of the instructors and the ambition of industrious and hopeful students.

These conflicts suggest a closer relation between the mechanism that trains and that which provides employment. The assistance that Negroes need and must have to insure reasonable opportunities in the employment field is nowhere available. Guidance is more than assisting an individual to know himself and how to utilize his opportunities—more than directing him to occupational literature and acquainting him with the world of work—and more than analyzing, testing, and scoring his mental and psychological reactions and rating his aptitudes and abilities. Finding a job is an integral and important part of all well ordered guidance programs. The Negro student, as well as his counselor, needs basic information on occupations supplemented by material pertinent to his own case. The Negro student, in high school and college, needs painstaking and not-too-hasty guidance by individuals who know something of the work world as well as the school world. But more than anything else, these young people need to know where to look for a job, how to look for it, and the labor conditions they will meet when seeking it. This was true before we had the depression. It is true now, and will be true when the depression ends.

Until quite recently, the Negro college graduate did not have to hunt employment. It was waiting for him when he was handed his diploma. And so the colleges turned out more and more graduates each year. Those who did not teach or preach went into law and medicine. As the relatively few teaching positions bidding for college and normal school graduates were filled, and the supply of college graduates mounted, new avenues of employment needed to be found. But the student with no special training for any special occupation, and no direction to unaccustomed fields, was left to find his own way. In most instances, he literally stumbled into his lifework.

The advance that the race has made in employment has been without the aid of those who were preparing it for employment. This is lamentable, but true. The school did the teaching, but the students "made it" on their own after completing school. Changes in curricula were made slowly as it became apparent that Negro students were entering into occupations beyond the level hitherto set for Negroes. A few schools boasted of "placing all of our graduates," and some made entrance possible into industrial plants. But, by and large, the college student found his own way into employment, the school having finished its job when the final dollar of tuition had been paid and the diploma delivered. This condition has not been limited to the colleges, for the same practices have been pursued by secondary schools, with more disastrous results to the high school student than to the college student.

The relation between training and employment could hardly be provided adequately by any one school. But it can easily be provided by them all. A Personnel Bureau, the possession of no one institution, but buttressing the personnel ser-

vices of all schools (liberal arts colleges as well as vocational schools, teacher-training institutions and land-grant colleges), devoted to all phases of guidance, would be the remedy for such a situation. Thus would the essentials of guidance, occupational research, and placement be made available to college students and graduates. Counseling to students in high schools and colleges could be provided by such a bureau, and literature could be prepared for teachers of occupations, for counselors, and for students as an aid to the selection of training programs. Such a bureau could keep records of college students, beginning perhaps with their sophomore year and continuing through their educational life and on into their occupational careers. Over-concentration in certain occupations could be lessened by the dissemination of information on probable locations for those seeking employment. In fact, such a bureau could be the center of information for facts and figures on occupational trends among Negroes; and would also be a ready source of reference for teachers and college presidents—the one when he or she was in search of employment, and the other when in search of capable instructors.

A centralized agency of this type would extend its service to employers on the basis of actual proved proficiency. Thus would employment service to Negroes be taken from the realm of group placement into the realm of individual selection. The case work method would then be the technique by which capable Negroes would be introduced into new or unusual jobs with the idea that the success of one well chosen individual would lead to the placement of others. If the bureau once gained the reputation for unbiased, honest evaluation of its applicants, it would become the agency to which employers, mindful of the need for ex-

tending opportunities to Negroes, and willing to assist, would turn for satisfactory Negro employes. As a non-profit venture, its recommendations would be void of commercial implication, and it would fill a vacancy in the educational and social machinery devoted to Negro life. Such a bureau, endorsed by personnel and guidance agencies and leading educational institutions, would doubtless find favor with the foundations as a means of meeting a distinct and definite need.