

ally and spiritually to face the challenges of high school instruction. In truth, many of them excel on the high school level.

I believe that in most cases a child who has difficulty in a multi-grade classroom would have similar problems in a single grade classroom.

These schools work not because the teachers are the world's best thinkers and instructors; not because you parents are the most dedicated parents in existence; nor because our students are the cream of the crop; but because they have God's continued blessing and support from day to day and from year to year. They are His gift to you as parents, students and teachers. He will give grace to covenant parents and teachers to maintain these schools to His glory and as a means to fulfil the covenant obligations and responsibilities of instructing His covenant seed.

CAREER EDUCATION: A LEGITIMATE EMPHASIS?

Don Doezema

There is a self-evident need, in my judgment, radically to reform an education which has become non-utilitarian and, in the words of the young people, "irrelevant" to such a large part of our clientele. Fully a third of our high school students leave school before graduation, with no skills, no marketable resources, and no intention or competence to enter college.

There can be no doubt that it is that sort of assessment of the American educational scene which gave impetus to what has become a movement of no little importance in the schools of our country: Career Education. The indictment was made by Sydney P. Marland, the then HEW Assistant Secretary for Education, in a speech made at a 1972 meeting of the Board of Directors and the staff of the Council for Basic Education. The remedy, as he saw it, was an all-pervasive Career Education, ranging from the early elementary grades all the way through secondary and post-secondary education. Marland could speak as a representa-

tive of Uncle Sam, which fact could not have hurt the cause of Career Education at all, since the support of the federal government is translated into dollars and cents. And, needless to say, school systems throughout the country make every effort to secure for themselves as large a share of Federal funds as they possibly can. As James D. Koerner, another speaker at that same CBE meeting put it, the overwhelming support given by educators to the notion of Career Education "may have less to do with commitment than currency." He went on to suggest that "a hundred million dollars or a couple of hundred million Federal dollars is a powerful proselytizer. It represents a pot of money big enough to produce instant converts to almost anything." However that may be, the fact is that Career Education is a force to be reckoned with, and we do well to consider and evaluate what its advocates have to say about it.

One ought really to begin an examination of this sort with a definition of terms. In this case however a definition is a bit hard to come by, at least if one aims to discover what Career Education means to its proponents, for few have ventured to define exactly what Career Education is. The critic mentioned above, in fact, complained that Career Education means a hundred things to a hundred different spokesmen, "who themselves seem unwilling or unable to reduce the obscurity that surrounds the subject." At the very least, though, we can point out that its supporters are quite insistent that Career Education must be distinguished from Vocational Education. The latter is no more than job training—that is, training for the purpose of acquiring entry level skills in a particular trade. It includes courses such as auto mechanics, commercial art, electronics, and welding. It does not include courses like business law, consumerism, mechanical drawing, and typing, which are part of a general, as opposed to vocational, education. To elaborate a bit more on this, we could say that there are really two major divisions in high school curriculum: vocational and academic. The academic in turn is often subdivided into two tracks, the one leading to college and the other intended to end in high school, but both properly including the elements of a good liberal arts education.

Now then, how does Career Education fit into that scheme? Perhaps it can be described as an attempt somehow to consummate a marriage between the general and the vocational.

Proponents, we might point out, prefer not to speak of Career Education as a particular *kind* of education. Writes Dr. McMurrin (U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1973),

All education, in addition to whatever else it may be, should be Career Education. "Career" added to "education" may well be employed to explain or emphasize a characteristic or facet of any or all education whatever... . Anything worthy to be called "education" must be relevant to the cultivation of those capabilities and qualities that make possible or in various ways enhance a career.

And he goes on to say that "we should no longer separate liberal education from Career Education and set them against one another, either in our thinking or in curriculum structures."

The executive director of examinations of the College Entrance Examinations Board, T. Anne Cleary, concurs. She writes that "it (i.e., Career Education) is best viewed as an attempt to reorganize the entire school program around a dominant idea that will affect all levels and all major disciplines in the schools."

That "dominant idea" is one's *career*, of course. And with that we are getting close to a definition, too. Stephen Bailey, Chairman of the Policy Institute of the Syracuse University Research Corporation, goes to Webster in his search for the elusive definition. He writes,

One dictionary definition of career is "one's progress through life." Perhaps as useful a definition of Career Education as any might be an education that pays special attention to personal growth in terms of occupational, avocational, and personal skills friendly to "one's progress through life."

Career Education, therefore, is something which encompasses both the vocational and the academic aspects of education. Which of the two should receive the emphasis is apparently a moot question with many of the advocates of Career Education. Or, rather, it's probably the case that they prefer not to speak of a dominance at all. Both intellectual development and the acquisition of technical skills needed for employment, they will insist, are indispensable to the student's preparation for his career.

The goal of Career Education, it is clear, is that "all educational experiences, curriculum, instruction, and counseling, should begin the preparation for economic independence and an appreciation of the dignity of work" (from a briefing paper put

out by the Office of Education). That's quite an order. In fact, one may well ask how in the world that could ever be implemented throughout the grades. Supporters of Career Education are, it seems, as little agreed on that as they are with respect to the definition. Sydney Marland takes what seems to be a more moderate position. He suggests that Career Education in the elementary school should consist in making the child aware of an eventual need for a career, giving him some idea of what a career is all about and what the economic world is like. In high school, he says,

the career aspect of the curriculum would be intensified and sharpened, enabling the young person not only to arrive intelligently at a number of career possibilities he would like to explore but to get some hands-on feeling for them, certainly never closing out other choices.

And he adds, interestingly, that

at this age he (the student) would rarely say I'm going to be this, or this, or this. Having a wide range of career information on which to draw, he would at some point be prepared to leave the system...ready to go to work.

That, we said, appears to be a more moderate set of objectives. Anne Cleary has more ambitious plans. She proposes that work-study opportunities be "vigorously developed." Every student, to her way of thinking, should be "pressed to select a vocational field and begin specific preparation for it during the secondary years." She goes on to describe one of the model programs submitted by the U.S. Office of Education. According to this model, all possible occupations would be grouped into fifteen clusters. These clusters would be studied in the lower grades. In junior high school the student would be expected to select three of the clusters for more intensive exploration. And in senior high he would narrow the field to one cluster and then proceed to develop sufficient skill in a single occupation within that cluster in order to qualify for a job in it. All students would be required, in addition, to have some actual work experience while still in school, but, Cleary adds, "they would retain options to change vocational objectives or go on to higher education." How sporting can one be!

Cleary goes on to state that Career *guidance* would begin early and would be highly efficient and specific. Quoting, I think, from the Office of Education report, she notes that counselors

would "become job market analysts with a touch of clairvoyance. They (would) need to know what job opportunities are likely to be available locally, statewide, and nationwide 5 to 10 years hence in order to steer youngsters into promising fields."

And, as if all that were not already quite enough, she adds that, finally, "schools would establish placement services to find jobs for graduates and would be responsible for adult education and the retraining of older workers to a greater degree than they are now."

One cannot help but wonder, along with Koerner, "how compelling the whole idea of Career Education would prove to be if it had to make its way in the schools solely on its merits"—that is, without the aid of Federal currency.

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It would be manifestly impossible for our small school system to develop a full-blown vocational education program. We simply do not have the resources to provide the facilities and personnel required to give the hands-on training which will equip a student with the kind of entry level skills, in a wide variety of areas of interest, which will enable him "to leave the system, ready to go to work." A single room in the Kent Skills Center in Grand Rapids houses equipment, the purchase price of which exceeds the cost of the construction of one of our smaller schools. But we cannot conclude from this that none of the objectives of career education are available to us. Our high school can, for example, give a student classroom credit for satisfactory performance in course work at the local skills centers, attended on a part-time basis. And, too, our schools could make the matter of careers to be that "dominant idea" around which the curriculum at all levels is organized. We can therefore well face the question of whether or not we want to have any part in the goals and methodology of the career enthusiasts.

It's to be expected, I think, that anyone with any kind of appreciation for the Reformed concept of the purpose of education will reject out of hand the main tenets of Career Education. The fact is that the placing of orientation to economic life at the center of the school program is crass materialism. And the sad fact is, further, that the American public today *embraces* that materialistically utilitarian approach to education. Vocational

competence is seen as *the* reason for having schools. A recent Gallup Poll of American attitudes toward education reports that in a national sample of 1614 adults who were asked to name the principal reason why children should attend school, 44 percent responded "to get a better job," and 38 percent "to make more money." Leonard Kriegel, in an article entitled "Culture and the Classroom," makes this very telling indictment against the emphasis of Career Education:

Career training is grounded in efficiency and productivity; it is "hands-on" education which eschews abstraction and value judgments, creating by its nature a value vacuum in which the student is concerned primarily—sometimes obsessively—with perfecting skill which will get him a job which will provide the money to purchase the things necessary for the good life.

Advocates of Career Education would be quick, I'm sure to challenge the correctness of that statement, but the fact is that, in their system, any course which cannot be related somehow to the acquisition of employable skills must be of doubtful value in the program. Students betray a tendency toward that sort of value system when they ask questions like, "What is the 'use' of an English literature course to me; I'm going to be an automobile mechanic?"

There are, in addition, objections of a more practical nature which can be brought against Career Education, or at least against the vocational training which seems to be an integral part of it. One of these objections is the probability of a student's spending a considerable amount of time and effort in preparing himself for a job which, in the end, does not become his life's work. A study conducted by the American Institute of Research showed that only 30% of vocational graduates were employed in jobs for which they had been trained. Surveys show, too, that an individual who does in fact enter the occupation for which he was trained is more likely than not to *change* jobs during his working career—and often more than once. Such change often comes about as a result of a redirection of one's interest. But what is perhaps an even more important element involved in the expected attrition rate is the fact that, in our technological society, *jobs* change, leaving workers with skills for jobs that no longer exist. There is, of course, a certain amount of stability in some areas; but in others, certain kinds of work may become obsolete before one completes his training for it. Besides, jobs

requiring new and different skills arise, as it were, overnight. It's been estimated, according to an article in a recent issue of the *National Association of Secondary School Principals*, that 70 % of the jobs that will exist in 15 years do not exist now. R. Baird Shuman, editor, of *Clearing House*, addresses himself to this problem in a short article entitled "Vocational Oversell," in the March, 1977, issue of his magazine. He writes that

In almost every secondary school we find large numbers of students enrolled in career oriented programs that prepare them for jobs which may not exist. In a rush to equip students with "career" skills, we actually may be decreasing students' "marketability." In many programs, students become so specialized that they may well lack the necessary flexibility to adjust to a constantly changing job picture.

Closely related to this is the matter of career counseling. Career guidance, I think, must be taken for granted in the program, for, as the Career Education advocates suggest, students must be encouraged early to begin narrowing down their career choices. And a school that will insist on that must be prepared to give *guidance*. But the question is, how is it possible for counselors to give that kind of direction? How will they be able to determine what is best for an individual student, so that they can confidently enroll him in specific career oriented classes. Are vocational aptitude tests the answer? There's no doubt but that these tests can be of assistance in counseling; for they can, for example, reveal a student's proficiency in the verbal and mathematical skills which are essential for certain kinds of occupations. On the basis of such test scores, a counselor can safely advise a student who has no end of difficulty with mathematics, that he ought not to consider a career in engineering. But, beyond that, a guidance counselor, even when armed with a battery of scores from differential aptitude tests, will find himself in no position to steer a student toward a specific career choice. He can *advise*—we have no quarrel with that. Fact is, we perhaps ought to pay more attention to vocational counseling, particularly at the high school level. But the problem, as we see it, with the concept of Career Education is that that advice must be translated into class assignment, designed to provide a student with entry level skills in a particular occupation. And what we're suggesting is that there might be something to be said for that kind of specialization in high

school...if there were some way of determining what would eventually be the work for which the student would need preparation. We'll have more to say about this later, but suffice it to say for now that, in the absence of an infallible guide to making that determination, a student is much better advised to concentrate on the basics.

There is a related problem, incidentally, in that, even if school counselors were indeed able to determine the particular careers for which their students are best suited, it would be impossible to provide "hands-on" experience for everyone—since, as one worrier put it, "the world of work ranges from the dishwasher to the Nobel physicist."

But, needless to say, proponents of Career Education have a ready response for such objections. They will insist, first of all, that the difficulty of settling on a specific occupation for which to train serves exactly to point out the necessity of making the vocational planning process a long one, beginning already in the elementary grades. In addition, that same difficulty underscores the importance of each student's having an opportunity, in school, to *explore a variety* of vocational possibilities. And, finally, they're not at all disturbed by the fact that there are some 23,000 different jobs available in the United States, and by the fact that changes in occupations occur with predictable regularity in the world of work. This presents no problem, they say, because Career Education is not designed to prepare a student for only *one specific occupation*. Rather, he's encouraged to learn about work in one of the fifteen clusters into which the 23,000 different jobs have been reduced. The "cluster" concept, therefore, broadens the base of vocational education, for when a student is equipped with a wide range of information about various jobs in a particular cluster, he will be able to move into and out of the jobs in that cluster much more easily.

One is inclined to wonder, is he not, how young people ever managed to obtain jobs before the days of Career Education. But they did—and still do. The Superintendent of a rather large city public school system recently reported to the city's Board of Education that all except about 200 of the previous year's graduates had either found jobs or were involved in additional training. He apparently felt that was, in a school system so large, a very good record. Yet, he was not entirely pleased, for, he said, "In most cases, however, this was by accident rather than as a

result of anything we as a school system did to bring it about." I had the distinct impression that he was disappointed that it had just *happened*. He was disappointed that he could not report that it had come about as the result of a concentrated effort on the part of the school to *prepare* students for entering the career of their choice. Perhaps he ought rather to have concluded from the success of his former students in finding employment that all the current emphasis on Career Education is quite unnecessary.

Detractors are indeed convinced that that's the case. Shuman, for example, writes that

American education could be making a colossal mistake in its vocational oversell.... Instead of herding American students into job preparation that may not be needed because the job is no longer available when a student graduates, let us make our case for helping students obtain certain skills needed for human communication and social integration. Then we can be certain students will possess the basic skills upon which any career should and can be built.

The fact is, of course, that preparation, properly understood, for his life's work is of central importance in one's education—from kindergarten through graduate school. The question, however, is this: Is a strong liberal arts education, as Shuman suggests, a better preparation for that work than is a program that stresses vocational training? Related to that: are the two mutually exclusive? And, finally, is there something we can learn from Career Education? We would like to "make our case" for the liberal arts, of course, and we want also to speak a bit to the related questions; but that will have to wait for another issue of this magazine.

With the coming of metrics, we must relearn some common expressions, as for example: It hit me like 907 kilograms of bricks.... 28.35 grams of prevention is worth 453.59 grams of cure.... Give him 2.54 centimeters and he will take 1.609 kilometers.... Peter Piper picked 8.81 liters of pickled peppers. —From *Georgia School Boards Association Bulletin* and *The Education Digest*.