

The Open School Door

A Series of Articles on Clinton County
Schools and Their Problems

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What is vocational education? Why do many educators feel that it is so vital?

We often hear so much today about a general high school education or else about the college-bound student. What about all of the Clinton county area younger folks who expect more than a high school diploma from their school system? In other words, these students expect to be prepared for their employment future.

Included within "vocational education" are such areas as business, agriculture, home-making, and industrial education.

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MORE RECENTLY, the notion that "general education" is suitable as an all-purpose type of education has been introduced. This concept, which seems to me to be a mistaken one, only served to avoid the real question, which is: Should the comprehensive high school, in addition to providing general education for all, meet the specialized needs of both those youth who will attend college and those youth who will seek employment upon graduation?

James B. Conant answers this question in his report on the American High School Today when he states that "the three main objectives of a comprehensive high school are: first, to provide a general education for all the future citizens; second, to provide good elective programs for those who wish to use their acquired skills immediately on graduation; third, to provide satisfactory programs for those whose vocations will depend on their subsequent education in a college or university."

in this category is large enough in most schools to form a sizable block. The need to do something about the specialized preparation of these young people is becoming more acute, not only because of the numbers involved but because of the problems created by our failure to meet their needs.

If it is true that society has a need for more and better trained manpower, and further, that youth of high school age have a psychological need (in addition to an economic need) for preparation for entrance into the labor force, we can come to either one of two conclusions:

1. — that secondary schools of the future will more adequately meet those needs of society and youth, or
2. — that some modern counterpart of the National Youth Administration will step into the void and serve these needs.

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THERE HAS crept into the thinking of educators and laymen the idea that youth who elect vocational courses and curriculums must pursue their vocational interests to the exclusion of general or cultural education. However, this is neither desirable nor necessary on the high school level. A balanced program for any student would include both general and specialized courses.

Finally, the point should be made that no matter how good the high school pre-employment training program may be, it cannot give youth a full and complete vocational preparation which will serve them for a lifetime of employment.

It can and must give youth those skills, insights, and understandings which they need in order to make a satisfactory

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THERE APPEARS to be a growing concern among high school teachers in general, but more particularly among high school administrators and counselors, that those youth who are not likely to go on to college need some kind of specialized education which will prepare them for employment.

This growing concern is based upon a number of discernible trends in our society and in education:

1. — Technological advances emphasize the need for trained manpower.

2. — Psychological studies of the problems and concerns of young people show with increasing clarity the fact that high school youth, especially in grades 11 and 12, have as one of their primary concerns that of vocational choice and preparation.

3. — Opinion polls, questionnaires, recommendations of lay advisory committees — all have brought into sharp focus the facts that laymen, particularly parents, expect that youths' secondary education will contribute directly to their preparation for employment.

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WHILE THE percentage of noncollege-bound youth in relation to the total secondary school population may not be increasing, the number falling

education. However, this is neither desirable nor necessary on the high school level. A balanced program for any student would include both general and specialized courses.

Finally, the point should be made that no matter how good the high school pre-employment training program may be, it cannot give youth a full and complete vocational preparation which will serve them for a lifetime of employment.

It can and must give youth those skills, insights, and understandings which they need in order to make a satisfactory initial adjustment to the world of work. Continuing education for work is needed, and should be provided through post high school and adult education offerings.