

A DEMOCRATIC PROGRAM OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION¹

By R. W. HEIM

State Director for Vocational Education and Professor of
Agricultural Education

Much has been said and written during the past few decades for and against vocational education. Certain educators seem to be against any form of vocational education; others would modify our present school curricula and teach certain of the vocations in our regular schools; still others would make vocational education a separate and distinct kind of training and set up a dual system of schools. Most of the adverse criticisms of vocational education, however, are against a rather narrow form of trade training that develops manipulative skill at the expense of industrial intelligence. In this paper I shall discuss some of the most common of the contentions of educators and, at the same time, bring out facts concerning a broad democratic program for education.

At the outset it should be stated that no system of education is democratic unless it does provide for vocational education. One of the first requisites for a good citizen is the capacity for self-support. Each individual is entitled to such opportunities as will enable him to make the most of the possibilities of life. We should provide for equality of opportunity for the people of the nation and a program of education that provides instruction along vocational lines will do much toward developing equal opportunities, especially for the masses. We quite agree with Mr. Gillette in the following statement: "Our educational system can be regarded as

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democratic only when, and in so far as, all lines of knowledge and training are placed on a basis of equality of rating; so that individuals and communities may be able to select that training which their interests seem to demand, without being blinded and prohibited by purely traditional estimates in favor of some end or subject."

The people of the masses are now conscious of the value of vocational education. They realize that every person should be trained to do his work better and they feel that the school should prepare the youth for a successful career along some line. There was a time when the ninety-seven percent of our people who lived in the rural communities could obtain the necessary training for their work on the farm or in the farm home. At the present time, however, with approximately fifty percent of the people living in cities, only a limited number have the opportunity of learning definite vocations through the apprenticeship system. The others must learn their vocations by what has been called the "pick up" system with its great loss of time and opportunity. Some system must be devised whereby those entering vocations are trained for their life work, and, as has been said previously, it is to the schools that the people should look for this training.

In the past our schools have not been very democratic. They have been operated for the few rather than for the many. The higher schools have regulated the courses of the lower with the end in view of preparing the pupils for the higher schools. This is a good arrangement for the few who continue their school education for an extended period and enter the professional vocations later. But what of the large number of pupils who never reach the higher levels in school education? We must provide for them through the schools.

But our youth require more than mere vocational efficiency and our program is undemocratic unless it pro-

vides for academic training as well as vocational training. It is absolutely necessary, for example, that artisans understand the reasons "why" certain things in their vocation happen as they do if they are to fit themselves into new situations as they arise. They require a knowledge of industrial intelligence as well as technical trade efficiency and, further, our workmen must be intelligent for their own sakes as well as for the sake of their work and they must be educated to respect other workmen in other fields of endeavor to the end that all may appreciate the obligations and responsibilities which society as a whole has placed upon them. The employed class must have opportunities to express initiative in their work and not be content to follow docilely the direction of their employers. Thus, a broad system of academic training is necessary in any balanced program for vocational education and any scheme of education which does not take this broader view point into consideration is dangerous to the welfare of society.

At the present time most of the schools offering vocational work are providing for this broader training. Many vocational classes devote approximately fifty percent of the time to vocational subjects and fifty percent to non-vocational work. Those in charge of the vocational educational work subsidized by the Federal Government encourage the giving of academic training along with the vocational, with the result that every State in the Union today has a fairly well organized vocational program built on these sound lines.

Criticism frequently brought against vocational education is that it promotes early specialization, thus taking the boy or girl away from school influences early in life. This is likely to be true if we think of vocational education as a narrow trade education. Our aim should be to keep the pupils in school as long as possible and, with a broad system of vocational education such as has been outlined above, there is reason to believe that many pu-

pils will remain in school longer than they do under the present academic system. Usually the reason pupils leave school is because they do not like school and often these pupils will like school better if they can study some kind of vocational work.

Thus far most of the statements have dealt with vocational education for the trades and industries, but a democratic program must provide training other than for the trades. Home makers, farmers, those in commercial pursuits, and many others need vocational education. For example, there are over 25,000,000 home makers in America and it is only within the past five or six years that schools have given any particular instruction that will help the coming home makers of America to a fuller realization of their life work. At the present time this kind of instruction is given only in certain schools. The opportunities along this line should be increased until any girl no matter where she lives can secure through the public schools good practical instruction in home making.

Agriculture, like home making, is now taught in many of our public schools, but the number of places is too few. If our schools are to be democratic we must make it possible for any boy who wishes to do so to study the vocation of farming. If he lives in the country, there should be some school near by that offers agriculture; if he lives in the city and wishes to study farming, he should be sent to a school where vocational agriculture is taught.

Commercial instruction as taught at present in most of our schools is not very practical and can be greatly improved. A democratic program should provide the kind of instruction that will fit a boy or a girl to enter commercial pursuits, if he or she so desires.

The schools have been democratic in providing vocational instruction for the professions, but usually this

instruction has come after the period of so-called general education. We have, for example, law, medical and dentistry courses offered in many colleges. These in many States are conducted at public expense and may in a way be termed public schools. This kind of instruction should be at public expense and its scope should be greatly broadened.

If we are going to be democratic in our program we must not stop with home making, agriculture, commercial branches and instruction for the professions. Not all our people enter these lines. What shall the schools do for the person who wishes to be a barber, a life insurance salesman, a street car motorman, a plumber, or one of the many other vocations of which there are over 2000 in America? Instruction should be provided at public expense that will fit pupils for practically any vocation. Such instruction is theoretically practicable, provided the necessary working means and conditions can be secured.

Much of the instruction for vocational work should be training (in the broad sense) in service. One form of this is called part-time instruction. This applies chiefly to boys working along industrial lines. They go to school for a part of the day and work at their trade for the remainder of the day. The technical work is given at the school and the practical work at the shop. Thus, the school work is directly connected with the vocation, and this is as it should be, for the more nearly the conditions can be made like those of the work-a-day world, the better are the chances for the boy to succeed in his vocation. A program that offers the theoretical or technical training without offering at the same time an opportunity to secure manipulative skill in the vocation is undemocratic. An important factor in this kind of education, too, is that boys who may have entered a vocation are enabled to advance in that vocation by reason of the knowledge they gain in the school about the

vocation. Surely, this type of vocational training is democratic.

Training in service is capable of wide expansion. It may be conducted as evening classes for adult workers in industry. To these classes the workers can come to secure information about their vocations, or the scope can be broadened to include work of a general educational nature. Classes of this type need not and should not be limited to workers in industry. There is abundant opportunity for valuable work along this line for farmers, home makers, men in business and many others. Instruction for these people with their abundant background of experience can be made very effective and will function not only with their vocations, but with their lives as citizens as well. Merely the gathering together as a group where experiences are related and discussions enjoyed is in itself educative. One feature of this training in service is the fact that it is for adults as well as children. If we are to have a democratic system the adults of a community have a right to our consideration. I see no reason why school work should stop with instruction to children; adults benefit by the type of school instruction I have outlined.

A criticism often brought against vocational education is that it promotes industrialism. This is true if the instruction is of the narrow trade education type. In the past many of the schools over-emphasized the acquiring of manipulative skills and did not offer enough instruction about the vocation. This type of work, however, is less common than formerly; further, in a broad democratic system of vocational education such as has been outlined in this paper, with the academic work stressed as a large part of the preparation for a life work, there would be still less criticism of this phase of vocational instruction.

One of the chief arguments against vocational education by those particularly interested in general edu-

cation is that it will set up a dual system of education. In the past such systems have been established in many cities. They have gone so far in some places as to have separate funds, separate supervisory authorities and separate buildings for carrying on the work. Many educators, especially those interested in the vocational phase of the work, claim that the best results can be secured by the dual system; others are equally as strongly in favor of a single system. This is an important question and needs careful thought and consideration by school administrators. As far as the use of separate buildings is concerned it seems to the writer that the decision depends largely upon local conditions and the particular vocation that is to be taught. I agree with Dr. Dewey that "methods must be modified to allow and to secure direct and continuous occupations with things" and that "when schools depart from the educational conditions effective in the out-of-school environment they necessarily substitute a bookish, a pseudo-intellectual spirit, for a social spirit." Our schools, then, must be so located that the pupils can come in direct contact with the vocational work they are studying. This means that the home making work should have practical application in the home, that much of the instruction in agriculture should be on the farms, that the commercial work should correlate with business, and so on. If separate schools will give us this contact better than the cosmopolitan school let us have separate schools. On the contrary, if the reverse is true, let us teach the vocations in the schools where the academic studies are taught. Agriculture and home making in rural districts can be taught effectively in the buildings of the regular school system, but this is due largely to the fact that much of the instruction is done at the homes and on the farms of the community. There is no extensive laboratory equipment required in the school buildings, because the farms and homes supply a wealth of practical equipment ready

to be utilized. Such vocations as bookkeeping and stenography can be taught in city schools where they are facilities for practical work nearby. For many vocations, however, the regular school can never provide the equipment necessary to teach the work effectively. Barbers, street car motormen, plumbers, and machinists, for example, cannot be trained for their specific work except in special schools. This will mean that often we shall have a boy in one locality, who, if he is to secure instruction along a certain line, will need to go to some other locality where the instruction is given. In such cases he should be sent there at public expense. This will be nothing really new in school work, for we now transport pupils from rural districts to city districts in order that they may attend high schools. Why not transport a boy from one locality to another in order that he can study a certain vocation?

It is claimed by some educators that vocational education is not necessary for a democratic program of education and that a liberal education is broad enough to prepare for life. They affirm that many of our leading men have been trained for their respective vocations by securing a liberal training, and that if a man secures a liberal education, he will be able to adapt himself to almost any line of work he may desire to pursue. Furthermore, they claim that many people who prepare for specific vocations fail to follow the line for which they prepare. This is especially true of agricultural college graduates, as statistics show that only a limited number of such graduates ever farm.

In answer to the above contention, I claim that the preceding paragraphs have shown that vocational education is necessary for a democratic program of education. In regard to a liberal education preparing for vocations we can be sure that any man who prepares for a vocation by means of a liberal education would be better prepared by reason of a vocational education, provided

it was the broad type of vocational education described in this paper. The fact that many prepare for specific vocations and do not follow these vocations is no argument against vocational education; this condition is true in all lines of endeavor. Any man has the right to change his vocation at any period of life if he wishes to do so.

The passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 confirmed the opinion that a system of vocational education should be a public school function. The purpose of the Smith-Hughes Law is to train for useful and productive employment along the lines of agriculture, trades and industries, and home making. Since the majority of people engaged in gainful occupation is in one of these phases of work it is evident that Congress desired that the masses be trained. The passage of this act also confirmed the opinion of the American people that vocational education is of equal importance to any other form of education and, because of this fact, deserves the support of the nation.

Briefly, a summary of the various topics treated in this paper is: (1) that no system of education is democratic unless it provides for vocational education; (2) that a large part of the training of youth should be academic training; (3) that our youth should have an extended period in which to secure their education; (4) that our scheme of vocational education should provide for all types of vocations; (5) that training in service is an important phase of vocational education; (6) that narrow trade training that promotes industrialism is undemocratic; (7) that the question of the dual system needs very careful consideration by educators and that, as far as the use of a separate building for vocational work is concerned, that matter depends largely on local conditions and the particular vocation to be taught; (8) that a liberal education is not always broad enough to

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prepare for life; (9) that the passage by Congress of the Smith-Hughes Act confirms the opinion that vocational education should be supported by the public.