DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 048 480 VT 012 620

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TITLE Career Education Now.
PUB DATE Jan 71
NOTE 15p.; Presentation at the National Association of Secondary School Principals (Houston, Tex., Jan 23, 1971)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Career Planning, Economic Progress, Educational Attitudes, Educational Change, Educational Coordination, *Educational Needs, *Educational Objectives, *Educational Responsibility, Manpower Needs, School Role, Technological Advancement, *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

Despite a growing role for vocational education as technological change causes skill requirements to rise, society continues to treat vocational education as inferior to academic education. In a broad sense, all education is career education, providing the skills necessary to live. Until all forms of education can be integrated in a comprehensive program of career development, an interim strategy involves four major actions: (1) redirecting federal support toward state programs for high demand occupations, (2) providing broader programs to improve flexibility of career choice, (3) improving coordination with business and organized labor, and (4) increasing support for career education at all levels. (BH)

CAREER EDUCATION NOW*

An Address by Sidney P. Marland Jr.
U.S. Commissioner of Education
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

Since I intend to devote a major part of my remarks today to the subject of career education, it seems appropriate to begin by mentioning that I am finding my new job to be a richly rewarding learning experience.

Take the matter of the Commissioner's place in the Washington pecking order. I have always held the commissionership to be one of the great and auspicious positions in the Federal Government. So naturally, when I learned that a prominent Federal official is issued a brand new $30,000 bulletproof limousine each year, I immediately inquired into the nature of the transportation furnished to the Commissioner of Education.

It turned out to be rather basic -- a small, misshapen, used Rebel. When I asked for an improvement, I was sent a slightly newer, small, misshapen, used Rambler.

I am not discouraged. I am merely chastened. It's really a very nice car. And, besides, I have been assured that the Commissioner hardly ever gets shot at.

*At the 1971 Convention of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Sam Houston Coliseum, Houston, Texas, Saturday, January 23, 1971, 10:00 a.m.

Career education is an absorbing topic at the Office of Education lately. In essence we are attempting to answer a very large question: what is right and what is wrong with vocational education in America today and what can be done to build on our strengths and eliminate our weaknesses?

I will indicate to you in a few moments the major points of our reply, the steps we believe should be taken by the Federal Government and particularly by the Office of Education to strengthen your hand in refashioning the vocational or career curriculum. For we are in wholehearted agreement that it is in serious need of reform and it is my firm intention that vocational education will be one of a very few major emphases of the U.S. Office, priority areas in which we intend to place the maximum weight of our concentrated resources to effect a thorough and permanent improvement.

But let me broaden the discussion a bit at this point to talk about career education not simply from the Federal point of view but from the point of view of you and me and of everyone who has committed his life's work to the proposition that education's prime task is to seek and to free the individual's precious potential. My concern with this vital area of education was with me long before I came into possession of my beat Rambler. It is the result of more than 30 years in school life, ample time to observe the vocational education problem in such diverse settings as New York City, Pittsburgh, and Winnetka, Illinois. For even in Winnetka, archetypal suburb, blessed in material things far above most communities in this country, there are many people who are worried about the logic and relevance of what is being taught their youngsters, particularly when considered in the light of the amazingly sophisticated, complex, and rapidly changing career situations they will face upon graduation from high school or from college.

Winnetkans, like most Americans, ask: what are we educating our children for?

Educators, it seems to me, have too often answered: we simply are not sure.

Uncertainty is the hallmark of our era. And because many educators have been unsure as to how they could best discharge their dual responsibility to meet the student's needs on the one hand and to satisfy the country's infinite social and economic appetites on the other, they have often succumbed to the temptation to point a God-like finger at vocational educators and damn them for their failure to meet the Nation's manpower requirements

and doubly damn them for their failure to meet the youngster's career requirements, not to mention his personal fulfillment as a human being.

Most of you are secondary school administrators. You, like me, have been preoccupied most of the time with college entrance expectations. Vocational-technical education has been a second-level concern. The vocational education teachers and administrators have been either scorned or condemned and we have been silent.

There is illogic here as well as a massive injustice. How can we blame vocational educators for the hundreds of thousands of pitifully incapable boys and girls who leave our high schools each year when the truth is that the vast majority of these youngsters have never seen the inside of a vocational classroom? They are the unfortunate inmates, in most instances, of a curriculum that is neither fish nor fowl, neither truly vocational nor truly academic. We call it general education. I suggest we get rid of it.

Whatever interest we represent, Federal, State, or local, whether we teach or administer, we must perforce deny ourselves the sweet solace of knowing the other fellow is in the wrong. We share the guilt for the generalized failure of our public system of education to equip our people to get and hold decent jobs. And the remedy likewise depends upon all of us. As Dr. Grant Venn said in his book, Man, Education, and Manpower: "If we want an educational system designed to serve each individual and to develop his creative potential in a self-directing way, then we have work to do and attitudes to change."

The first attitude that we should change, I suggest, is our own. We must purge ourselves of academic snobbery. For education's most serious failing is its self-induced, voluntary fragmentation, the strong tendency of education's several parts to separate from one another, to divide the entire enterprise against itself. The most grievous example of these intramural class distinctions is, of course, the false dichotomy between things academic and things vocational. As a first step, I suggest we dispose of the term vocational education, and adopt the term career education. Every young person in school belongs in that category at some point, whether engaged in preparing to be a surgeon, a brick layer, a mother, or a secretary.

How absurd to suggest that general knowledge for its own sake is somehow superior to <u>useful</u> knowledge. "Pedants sneer at an education that is useful," Alfred North Whitehead observed. "But if education is not useful," he went on to ask, "What is it?" The answer, of course, is that it is nothing. All education is career education, or should be. And all our efforts as educators must be bent on preparing students either to become properly, usefully employed immediately upon graduation from high school or to go on to further formal education. Anything else is dangerous nonsense. I propose that a universal goal of American education, starting now, be this: that every young person completing our school program at grade 12 be ready to enter higher education or to enter useful and rewarding employment.

Contrary to all logic and all expediency, we continue to treat vocational training as education's poor cousin. We are thereby perpetuating the social quarantine it has been in since the days of the ancient Greeks,

and, for all I know, before then. Since the original vocational fields were defined shortly before World War I as agriculture, industry, and homemaking, we have too often taught those skills grudgingly -- dull courses in dull buildings for the benefit of what we all knew were young people somehow pre-judged not fit for college as though college were something better for everyone. What a pity and how foolish, particularly for a country as dependent upon her machines and her technology as America. The ancient Greeks could afford such snobbery at a time when a very short course would suffice to instruct a man how to imitate a beast of burden. We Americans might even have been able to afford it a half-century ago when a boy might observe the full range of his occupational expectations by walking beside his father at the time of plowing, by watching the farmers, blacksmiths, and tradesmen who did business in his home town.

But how different things are today and how grave our need to reshape our system of education to meet the career demands of the astonishingly complex technological society we live in. When we talk of today's career development, we are not talking about blacksmithing. We are talking about the capacity of our people to sustain and accelerate the pace of progress in this country in every respect during a lifetime of learning. And nothing less.

The question seems to be fairly simple, if we have the courage and creativity to face it: Shall we persevere in the traditional practices that are obviously not properly equipping fully half or more of our young people or shall we immediately undertake the reformation of our entire secondary education in order to position it properly for maximum contribution to our individual and national life?

I think our choice is apparent. Certainly continued indecision and preservation of the status quo can only result in additional millions of young men and women leaving our high schools, with or without benefit of diploma, unfitted for employment, unable or unwilling to go on to college, and carrying away little more than an enduring distaste for education in any form, unskilled and unschooled. Indeed, if we are to ponder thoughtfully the growing charge of "irrelevance" in our schools and colleges, let us look sharply at the abomination known as general education.

Of those students currently in high school, only three out of 10 will go on to academic college-level work. One-third of those will drop out before getting a baccalaureate degree. That means that eight out of 10 present high school students should be getting occupational training of some sort. But only about two of those eight students are, in fact, getting such training. Consequently, half our high school students, a total of approximately 1,500,000 a year, are being offered what amounts to irrelevant, general educational pap!

In pained puzzlement they toil at watered-down general algebra, they struggle to recollect the difference between adjectives and adverbs, and they juggle in their minds the atomic weight of potassium in non-college science. The liberal arts and sciences of our traditional college-preparatory curriculum are indeed desirable for those who want them and can use them. But there must be desire and receptivity, and for millions of our children, we must concede, such knowledge is neither useful nor joyful. They do not love it for its own sake and they cannot sell it in the career market place.

Small wonder so many drop out, not because they have failed, but because we have failed them. Who would not at the earliest convenient and legal moment leave an environment that is neither satisfying, entertaining, or productive? We properly deplore the large numbers of young men and women who leave high school before graduation. But, in simple truth, for most of them dropping out is the most sensible elective they can choose. At least they can substitute the excitement of the street corner for the more obscure charms of general mathematics.

I want to state my clear conviction that a properly effective career education requires a new educational unity. It requires a breaking down of the barriers that divide our educational system into parochial enclaves. Our answer is that we must blend our curricula and our students into a single strong, secondary system. Let the academic preparation be balanced with the vocational or career program. Let one student take strength from another. And, for the future hope of education, let us end the divisive, snobbish, destructive distinctions in learning that do no service to the cause of knowledge, and do no honor to the name of American enterprise.

It is terribly important to teach a youngster the skills he needs to live, whether we call them academic or vocational, whether he intends to make his living with a wrench, or a slide rule, or folio editions of Shakespeare. But it is critically important to equip that youngster to live his life as a fulfilled human being. As Secretary Richardson said, "I remind you that this department of government more than anything else is concerned with humaneness."

Ted Bell, now Deputy Commissioner for School Systems in OE, made the point particularly well in a recent speech to a student government group. He was speculating on the steps a young person needs to take not just to get a diploma or a degree today, but to make reasonably sure he will continue to learn in the years ahead, to be an educated man or woman in terms of the future, a personal future.

> "Here," Dr. Bell said, "the lesson is for each person to develop a personal plan for lifelong learning: learning about the world we live in, the people that inhabit it, the environment -- physical and social -- that we find around us; learning about the sciences, the arts, the literature we have inherited and are creating; but most of all, learning the way the world's peoples are interacting with one another. If one educates himself in these things, he will have a pretty good chance of survival and of a good life."

In other words, life and how to live it is the primary vocation of all of us. And the ultimate test of our educational process, on any level, is how close it comes to preparing our people to be alive and active with their hearts, and their minds, and, for many, their hands as well.

True and complete reform of the high school, viewed as a major element of overall preparation for life, cannot be achieved until general education is completely done away with in favor of contemporary career development in a comprehensive secondary education environment. This is our ultimate goal and we realize that so sweeping a change cannot be accomplished overnight, involving as it does approximately 30 million students and billions of dollars in public funds. Until we can recommend a totally new system we believe an interim strategy can be developed entailing four major actions:

First we are planning major improvements in the vocational education program of the Office of Education. This program, as you know, involves the expenditure of nearly $500,000,000 annually and our intention is to make the administrative and programmatic changes that will enable the States to use this money to make their vocational education efforts more relevant to the needs of the young people who will spend their lives in careers in business and industry. We intend to give the States new leadership and technical support to enable them to move present programs away from disproportionate enrollments in low-demand occupations to those where national shortages exist and where future national needs will be high.

Right now State training programs fill only half the jobs available each year. The other half are filled by job seekers with no occupational job training of any kind. We do better in some fields than others, of course, particularly production agriculture where we are able to come closer to meeting the total need because it is a relatively static job market with little growth projected. About 70 percent of the demand in farm jobs will be met with trained help this year compared with only about 38 percent in the health occupations and 35 percent in various technical fields. This is nice if you happen to own a farm, not so nice if you run a hospital or laboratory.

We obviously require greater emphasis on such new vocational fields as computer programmers and technicians, laser technicians, and jet mechanics. We particularly need qualified people in health occupations such as certified laboratory technologists, dental assistants, occupational therapists, and the like. And, of course, we badly need men and women to capably service the rapidly growing environmental industries. Though when we speak of new occupations it is always useful to remind ourselves that even some of the newest, such as computer programming, for example,

will very likely be obsolete in 20 years or so, affirming once again the need for a sound educational base underlying all specific skill training.

Second -- here I speak of all cooperating agencies of education and government -- we must provide far more flexible options for high school graduates to continue on to higher education or to enter the world of work rather than forever sustain the anachronism that a youngster must make his career choice at age 14. This demands that we broaden today's relatively narrow vocational program into something approaching the true career education we would eventually hope to realize. Vocational students need much more than limited specific skills training if they are to go on to post-secondary education, whether at the community college or four-year level. And young people presently drifting in the general education wasteland need realistic exposure to the world of work, as well as to the option of general post-secondary schooling.

Third, we can effect substantial improvement in vocational education within current levels of expenditures by bringing people from business, industry, and organized labor, who know where the career opportunities are going to be and what the real world of work is like, into far closer collaboration with the schools. Eventually, further subsidies or other encouragement to industry to increase cooperative education and work-study could greatly enhance these programs. Efforts should be made by people in educational institutions offering occupational courses to get nearby employers to help in the training. This will not only aid the students but employers as well by providing these cooperating firms a ready supply

of skilled workers well prepared for the specific demands of their particular fields. I would add only this caveat: that these work experience arrangements be accepted and operated as genuine educational opportunities, of a laboratory nature, not simply as a source of cheap help for the business and pocket money for the student. Youngsters should be given the opportunity to explore eight, ten, a dozen occupations before choosing the one pursued in depth, consistent with the individual's ambitions, skills, and interests.

Fourth, we must build at all levels -- Federal, State, and local -- a new leadership and a new commitment to the concept of a career education system. For we require leaders willing to move our schools into more direct and closer relationships with society's problems, opportunities, and its ever-changing needs. I believe these leaders will come primarily from the ranks of organizations such as yours. Not only will the present vocational-technical education leaders be partners in change, but general educators, long dedicated to the old ways, must become new champions of the career program.

In closing, a word about two very promising OE efforts to help strengthen vocational-technical education in its most crucial aspect, personnel.

The teacher is by far the most important factor in the school environment. We all know this. And we also know that voc-ed teachers are in seriously short supply.

We are also keenly aware that vocational-technical education is starved for other critical personnel, especially those qualified to develop and administer productive programs.

The first effort, called Leadership Development Awards, is a doctoral-fellowship program under the Education Professions Development Act. It seeks to identify and train a cadre of leaders for the vocational-technical career education field. As an initial move we have made the first group of awards to 160 experienced vocational educators to enable them to undertake full-time study at the doctoral level.

These men and women are attending 11 universities which share an emphasis on career education. These institutions pay special attention to the needs of the disadvantaged and handicapped; they cooperate closely with industry, the States, and the local districts; and they have established close working relationships with the surrounding communities.

Training lasts from two to three years. It is not tied to the campus but is essentially an intensive internship program with opportunities for research and exploration into the complexities of our constantly changing occupational structure.

We believe these doctoral candidates will make a very constructive imprint on the world of career education. But they will not be cast adrift upon graduation to search out their own niche in that world. Their home States will develop plans for the most strategic use of their skills -- in colleges and universities which prepare career educators, in State department of vocational education, in community colleges, and at the local level for development of the entirely new approach school systems must take to career education.

Our second effort is a program, already producing impressive results, to help the States attract and train teachers and administrators in vocational-technical education. The Leadership Development Awards I have described will produce the shapers and developers of the new career education; this second effort will produce the teachers to carry out the realistic and contemporary plans and programs they develop.

We are funding a variety of State plans. The money is helping to train personnel to work with the disadvantaged and the handicapped, to develop innovative and effective methods of exchange between teachers and businessmen, and to design and carry out more effective vocational guidance, a particularly crucial area. The funds are also being used to increase the number of trades and industry teachers in the emerging occupations that I spoke of a few moments ago.

The overriding purpose of this program is to encourage the States to develop their own capacities and their own resources to produce vocational-technical teachers in the numbers we need and of a quality we need. This new blood will energize career education, particularly in our city schools, whose revitalization is certainly education's first order of business.

President Nixon put the matter well when he said, "When educators, school boards and government officials alike admit that they have a great deal to learn about the way we teach, we will begin to climb the up staircase toward genuine reform."

We have, I believe, begun to climb that staircase. We have begun, at least in part, the difficult, continuing work of reform. These recent tumultuous years of challenge and strife and all-encompassing change have given us lessons to learn, especially lessons in humility. But they have also taught us to hope and to act. The actions in vocational education and teacher education that I have outlined to you today are but the first in a series of reforms which I intend to initiate and carry out within the U.S. Office of Education. I solicit your reactions to what I have said for I particularly want to bridge the gulf between the Federal Government and the education leaders in the States, in the communities, indeed, in all the classrooms of America.

With a guarantee of your tolerance and support I will return to Washington and my new duties confident that the absolute need to develop a strong new program of career education is well understood by you who must understand it, that you and I agree on the kind of action that must be taken and the urgency of taking it. I respect and salute your capacity to reform the secondary schools of the land. In sum, the schools are engaged in swift change because you the educators have chosen to change them. The schools, I conclude, are in good hands.

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