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ABSTRACT

Aimed at federal policymakers, this monograph presents a discussion of the role of excellence in vocational education and the role of the government in achieving it. The report is organized into five chapters. In the first chapter, the dimensions of excellence are examined with a focus on values, the atmosphere of crisis engendered in part by a multitide of reports critical of our educational system, and questions about who should receive the rewards of education. The second chapter provides background information about the forces at work in educational philosophy, such as the classical tradition, separations between education and training, and the American structure of long and short education with higher status attributed to longer education. Two sources of policy problems--multiple policies and uncertain purposes--are described in the third chapter. Finally, the last two chapters present some policy alternatives and recommendations. Policy alternatives include the choice between a strong or weak federal role, the definition of excellence, the form of the policy initiatives, and the alternatives for structural change. Policy recommendations include emphasis on a strong federal role, the development of policies to encourage excellence, abandoning compliance approaches, and increasing the educational opportunities of disadvantaged persons. (KC)

Information Series No. 280

EXCELLENCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A POLICY PERSPECTIVE

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The National Center for Research in Vocational Education
The Ohio State University
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Columbus, Ohio 43210

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Vocational education programs in the United States serve a diverse clientele with a multitude of programs in complex and diverse settings. The diversity and complexity of these settings contribute, in fact, to the federal policymakers' dilemma: how to formulate federal educational policy that is relevant in all settings.

Policy analysis, too, is complex and multiopinionated. This dual complexity of programs and policy analysis presents special problems for developers of policy options. The policy analyst's role is seldom simple, but the search for policy alternatives that are meaningful and usable is an essential undertaking if vocational education is to move forward.

Federal policymakers are the primary audience for this policy paper. However, state and local policymakers should find the presentation of policy options and the discussion of their advantages and disadvantages useful.

The National Center expresses its appreciation to Gordon I. Swanson, the policy paper author. Dr. Swanson is Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Vocational and Technical Education at the University of Minnesota. He has been a Senior Program Officer for UNESCO and a Fulbright Scholar in the Federal Republic of Germany. Dr. Swanson has served as President of Phi Delta Kappa and the American Vocational Association.

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The National Center is indebted to the staff members who worked on the study. The study was conducted in the Information Systems Division, Dr. Joel Magisos, Associate Director. Dr. Floyd L. McKinney, Senior Research Specialist, served as Project Director and Alan Kohan as Graduate Research Associate. Dr. McKinney, a former secondary vocational education teacher, holds a Ph.D. in vocational education from Michigan State University. He has served as a university coordinator of graduate vocational education programs and as a division director in a state department of education. Mr. Kohan is a doctoral candidate in comprehensive vocational education at The

Ohio State University and has a M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Hawaii. Patsy Slone served as secretary for the project. Joan Blank and Roxi Liming provided technical editing, and final editorial review of the paper was provided by Janet Kiplinger of the National Center's Editorial Services area.

Robert E. Taylor
Executive Director
The National Center for Research
in Vocational Education

PREFACE

Federal policymakers need to be aware of alternative policy options before they can make decisions regarding the optimal resolution of critical problems in vocational education. By utilizing the expertise of vocational educators, the policy options should provide policymakers with information regarding anticipated impacts, advantages, and disadvantages of each alternative.

Recognizing this need of federal policymakers, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) requested that the National Center for Research in Vocational Education conduct a study for the purpose of preparing policy analysis papers in eight priority areas of high national interest. The areas identified by OVAE were (1) private sector involvement with the vocational community, (2) entrepreneurship, (3) defense preparedness, (4) high technology, (5) youth employment, (6) special needs of special populations, (7) excellence in education, and (8) educational technology.

In accordance with the instructions received from the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, the National Center for Research in Vocational Education conducted a limited competitive search for authors to develop policy analysis papers on the eight critical issues in vocational education. Vocational education faculty members from educational professional development (EPD) institutions of higher education entered the competition by submitting a five-page proposal. No proposals were received on the topic of defense preparedness. After an extensive internal and external review process, eight authors were approved by the Assistant Secretary for Vocational Education, U.S. Department of Education.

The authors were provided assistance in policy analysis procedures, identification of relevant literature, and feedback on draft papers by policy analysts and educators. The authors presented their papers at a seminar in Washington, D.C., for key federal vocational education policymakers.

Other policy papers produced in this series are these:

- George H. Copa, University of Minnesota
  Vocational Education and Youth Employment
- Andrew A. Helwig, East Texas State University
  Alternative Training Options for Structurally Unemployed Older Workers
- Dennis R. Herschbach, University of Maryland
  Addressing Vocational Training and Retraining through Educational Technology: Policy Alternatives
- Ruth P. Hughes, Iowa State University
  Secondary Vocational Education: Imperative for Excellence

- Clyde F. Maurice, The Florida State University
  Private Sector Involvement with the Vocational Community: An Analysis of Policy Options

- L. Allen Phelps, University of Illinois
  An Analysis of Fiscal Policy Alternatives for Serving Special Populations in Vocational Education

- N. Alan Sheppard, Morgan State University, formerly at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
  A Policy Analysis of Professional Development and Personnel Preparation for Serving Special Populations

Floyd L. McKinney
Project Director and Senior
Research Specialist

Alan Kohan
Graduate Research Associate

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary audience for this policy paper is federal policymakers. The secondary audience is state and local policymakers. The paper includes a discussion of the current crisis framework and its relationship to excellence. Background information is presented concerning conventional wisdom about excellence in vocational education. Policy alternatives and recommendations are included in the paper.

Definition of Vocational Education

The definition of vocational education used in this paper contains an important, non-traditional premise; namely, that while vocational education has undiminished concern for individual development, it has an equal concern for the best use of human resources and for improving the capacity of the environment to use an expanding stock of individual skills of many kinds. This definition provides that invasions of freedom may be more than an individual matter; they may also be matters involving groups, occupational categories, and cultures.

The Current Climate—The Crisis Framework

One cannot ignore the avalanche of reports about education and the nation's schools. Collectively, the reports are primarily engaged in finger pointing, curricular solutions, and evasion of the more fundamental policy considerations. Questions involving the purposes of education, the nature of excellence, the role of structure in achieving either excellence or purpose, and the overarching question of who should receive the dividends from an investment in education are still unexamined. The current climate, with its degree of emphasis and deemphasis (including the renewed deemphasis of vocational education), has an important influence on vocational education.

The Most Powerful Policy Determinants

The most powerful policy determinants are not codes, mandates, regulations, manifestos, or laws. They are accepted cants and conventions imbedded in the system. They include the following:

- The classical tradition - with merit identified as means rather than ends (e.g., subjects, examinations, and academic survival) and with longer and longer periods of education

- Separations between education and training - the growing cleavage (e.g. institutional, political, social class, etc.) that separates the clients of education and training within identical age categories

- Long education and short education - the *de facto* American educational structure where long education is more costly, questioned less, and leads to higher rewards; while short education is less costly, identified with lower rewards and associated with vocational education and training

Together, these policy determinants exist as accepted conventions which have been rarely challenged—the exception being the 1862 Morrill Act which influenced only a few professions and had minimal effect below the professional school level.

Sources of Policy Problems—Multiple Policies Transcending Uncertain Purposes

There are two sources of the policy problems. The first source involves the operational definition of excellence. If education is seen as a unidimensional activity engaged in creating a pool of undifferentiated talent, then excellence is associated with the characteristics of the pool and is defined by those who select from it and are external to it. If education is seen as a multidimensional activity engaged in creating a pool of differentiated talent, then excellence is associated with the talent and is defined by those who operate the system and those within the pool. Uncertainty, with respect to an acceptable concept of excellence, is a major source of a policy problem. Second, education suffers from its successes as well as its failures. Its major successes have been its capacity to accentuate, rather than to diminish, individual differences. Its failures have been its lack of capacity to deploy its successes over multiple educational dimensions for the stimulation of creativity, inventiveness, leadership, and relevance to real-world applications. An example is seen in the current British educational crisis—a crisis of education's success in achieving sterile academic (classical tradition) unidimensionality.

Form and Incidence of Policy

A first step in dealing with educational excellence is recognizing that policy may take many forms, have origins at many levels, and flow in many directions. The status question—the question of whether federal policy supersedes local policy or vice versa—is never a certainty. Second, the most powerful form of policy derives from the traditions of convention or cant. It is reinforced by the traditional structures for education and/or training in that preparation for the world of work is consistently identified with the lower rungs of the occupational ladder.

Where there is government intervention to influence policy, the action may be indirect (e.g., tax code) or direct (e.g., vocational legislation). The forms of direct policy intervention deriving from legislation include these:

- **Compliance demands** - e.g., adherence to funding formulas or prescribed classroom procedures.
- **Requiring subsidiary policies** - e.g., creating policies governing such activities as planning and administering.
- **Requiring the creation of a knowledge base** - e.g., for assessing performance through employer satisfaction or for program improvement.
- **Creating alternative educational structures** - e.g., the creation of Private Industry Councils, Prime Sponsors, or Job Corps Centers.

The typical approaches to policy implementation from the federal level are as follows:

- **Compliance** - required adherence to statutory or regulatory mandates enforced through reporting, monitoring and appeals.
- **Assistance** - provided through the return of tax revenues to provide incentives for planning or program improvement.
- **Advice** - a required intervention to reinforce compliance and to allay a federal mistrust of the democratic process at state and local levels (e.g., in vocational education legislation, it is required that special interests who lobby to achieve set-asides or special treatment in federal statutes be named to subsidiary advisory bodies for subsequent lobbying and/or compliance monitoring).

Policy Alternatives

The four major categories for federal policy alternatives are as follows:

- The nature of the federal role choosing between a strong or a weak role. A strong role requires a focus on ends, an inquiry approach to the illumination of policy alternatives, conditions that allow subsidiary jurisdictions to make informed decisions about the alternatives, and strong leadership. A weak federal role focuses on means, a compliance mentality, and administrative power.
- The question of excellence involves the various ways of defining excellence. It is proposed that the concept must include consideration of the segregating influence of vocational programs designed for many to be short-term, low in cost, or nonaccessible.
- The form of the policy initiative as discussed in the previous section of this summary.
- The alternatives for structural change, which include the following:
  - Accept the trend toward functional separateness and terminate any hope for achieving comprehensiveness in high schools or community colleges. Provide incentives for vocational education to reemerge in separate settings such as technical high schools and postsecondary technical institutes.
  - Provide incentives for the creation of special structures for instructor preparation: the adaptation of science, mathematics, and theory development to technological development: and for inquiry designed to inform policy.
  - Enlist the entire educational enterprise, particularly institutions of higher education in the task of renewing the promise of the Morrill Act, particularly in ways that can address quality and excellence for those choosing to enter occupations.

Policy Recommendations

1. There should be a strong federal role that provides incentives for achieving ends and generates strength leading to maximum performance rather than an emphasis of means which leads only to an accountability for minimums.

2. The federal government should invest resources to define excellence in vocational education and decide how it may be achieved in a modern democracy. This should include an analysis of the enormous costs of the nation's high dropout rate and the dangers of the segregating and polarizing trends in preparation for work.

3. Federal policy initiatives in vocational education which require compliance with federally determined implementation proscriptions should be abandoned. Such approaches erode initiative and professionalism at subsidiary levels.

4. A new and stronger federal role should establish policy initiatives that would renew the promise of the Morrill Act—namely, that the lower socio-economic classes shall be served with *longer* education, more integration of theory and utility, and the closing of the chasms between education and training. This recommendation may require massive structural change including, as in the case of the Morrill Act, an entirely new system of institutions.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This policy analysis paper seeks to highlight the existence and evolution of vocational education policy in relation to some emerging interpretations of excellence. It first discusses the importance to vocational education of the plethora of current national reports that leave vocational education in a policy limbo and without reference to guidelines relating to concepts of excellence. Second, it identifies some of the elements of the dynamics or the forces at work that influence vocational education and derive from historical developments and events. Third, it describes the source of the policy problems—the existence of multiple policies along with uncertain purposes. Fourth, it describes some policy alternatives, and finally, it offers some policy recommendations.

At the core of vocational education policy is a concern with the quantity and quality of a nation's human resources perceived as the relationship between the development of humans and their work. This embraces a spectrum of interests ranging from the factors that influence the acquisition and utilization of work-related skills to the ways of modifying the processes, the institutions, and indeed, even the environment in which such human resources are being used.

In the broadest sense, vocational education policy seeks to promote both the highest level of individual fulfillment within the framework of a free society and the best possible use of human resources. On one hand, vocational education is an ongoing effort to improve the ability of present and potential workers to prepare, adjust, and advance in their multiple relations with a dynamic work-related environment. On the other hand, vocational education is also an ongoing effort to improve the enviroments's capacity to use a constantly changing array of individual skills: an investment for the purpose of creating human resources most necessary for an enterprise, a community, or a nation to prepare, adjust and advance in its economic and social endeavors. These are seemingly disparate overall goals, and they require, therefore, a critical balance between a view of vocational education, which is seen as job filling on one hand, and improvement of the environment in which work is done on the other. This is a critically important premise in the definition of vocational education and the development of vocational education policy. It is, moreover, a nontraditional premise—one that is not likely to be included in the highly traditional imagery of vocational education.

Since the nontraditional premise involves the role of vocational education in altering and improving the environment, a word of explanation should be added. Although there are many examples, agricuiture may be the most universally understood. The environment of productivity in agriculture is not achieved by merely adding increments of science, technology, or more workers. This has been the costly lesson learned in much of the less-developed world. Rather it is in vocationally skilled ingenuity—the ability of individuals to use combinations of science, technology, and practical skill to create a more productive environment and to be able to use, thereafter, a continuously expanding array of productive skills.

Another example is shown in the analysis of characteristics of states that lead in spawning fast-growing small companies (e.g., California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Texas). Here the characteristics involve features of the environment operating as both a precursor and a corollary of the creation of new, fast-growing firms. These characteristics include an effective system of vocational-technical education, a research and technology responsive university, a variety of public and private capital funding mechanisms, and a number of larger firms from which smaller firms can spin-off (Tomlinson 1983).

In these early paragraphs it is also useful to make some observations regarding the concept of educational excellence, an elusive concept with many definitions and interpretations. In thinking about excellence, one's attention becomes attached to some dimensions or categories of excellence that can serve as a taxanomic arrangement ensuring that there is a kind of checklist for determining completeness of coverage. Some of the categories frequently employed are the following:

Student excellence—A category typically identified as the ability of students to perform in some distinctive way, usually shown by some proxy indicator of success as agile learners in the present and the promise of continued success in the future. Because there are students who are slow learners as well as quick learners and because the economically and socially disadvantaged students tend to learn less rapidly, the issue of student excellence is often socially and politically volatile.

Institutional excellence—A category ordinarily based on institutional comparisons of some kind, and indicating the ability of an institution to excel in some category of a declared mission. The most well-known attribute of institutional excellence is the ability of an institution to assemble and to retain quick-learning and, thus, academically agile students, or, as a corollary, the ability to assemble and retain students who are highly motivated toward achieving one or more of the institution's purposes.

Institutional program excellence—A category identified with institutional capacity in certain specified program areas such as the capacity of an institution to prepare, for example, distinguished artisans, scientists, or technicians.

System excellence—A category that is ill-defined but of obvious importance to describing the conditions within a state in which there is a carefully designed and functioning educational plan meant to guide the institutions, agencies, and organizations in achieving desirable purposes at the highest level of overall system performance.

One could possibly generate many more categories to add to the above incomplete list. Sooner or later, however, one discovers that there are dimensions of excellence in vocational education that are not so easily categorized or defined. A few of these dimensions are discussed next.

Dimensions of Excellence

Excellence and Governance

No characteristic of vocational education is more transparent than the existence of three levels of governance—federal, state, and local. The three levels account for enormous program variations among states. Even greater, perhaps, are the differences in federal-, state-, and local-level perceptions about the purposes of vocational education and about the nature of excellence associated

with these purposes. The desire to include vocational curricula in high schools is high at the local level and meager if not nonexistent as one moves closer to the federal level. A dramatic illustration involves the recurrent Gallup poll on education (Gallup 1983) that consistently reported the high priority accorded to vocational curriculum offerings by local citizens. In contrast, the *A Nation at Risk* report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) suggested that citizens give only a low, indeed a residual, priority to vocational education.

Excellence and Structure

While there are many interrelationships involving the structure of education and the achievement of excellence in vocational education, the aspect of structure to be highlighted here involves the clarity of the route map provided by so-called comprehensive schools to students with differing goals or aspirations. For students in college preparatory programs, there are, for example, progressive sequencing of courses that outline clear pathways for students moving through the program, clear directions from counselors, and a complete understanding of these structural elements by faculty members who are also products of such programs. For students who are not in college preparatory programs, there is ambiguity in sequencing and vagueness about the structures that will allow them to realize their expectations. The presence of structure, in the case of college preparatory programs, is also evident in the more hours of instruction per year and higher expectations by teachers for student achievement.

A study of the structural elements by Sanders and Stone (1983) has shown that comprehensive high schhols in California do not offer structured job- entry vocational programs. Indeed, the availability of vocational programs in regional centers, community colleges, or other centers serves to relieve the secondary schools of the financial burden, according to the study, of providing either programs or a structure for vocational education program excellence in high schools. The important, unaddressed question is whether the absence of structure related to excellence at the secondary level of vocational education is any different in regional centers, community colleges, Job Corps Centers, or in other institutions that have come into existence.

Excellence and Instructional Purposes

It is a fallacy to assume that talented teachers can be singled out for rewards on a basis separate from an evaluation of the effect of such teachers on students. More specifically, it is fallacious to assume that the ability of teachers to score high on tests is highly correlated with the ability of their students to be successful in achieving their educational purposes. Some educational purposes are identified with clear patterns of educational structure; other educational purposes are handicapped by vague or ambiguous patterns of structure. Some students are slow learners; some are rapid learners. Teachers identified with highly structured programs or with students who are highly purpose oriented are also likely to be teaching the fast learners. But there are other kinds of programs and other kinds of students, for example, economically and socially disadvantaged students, whose achievements are more modest and who tend to drop out of schools in greater numbers. Educational purpose, therefore, is not a neutral variable in consideration of educational excellence; it is related to the capacity of schools to accommodate various forms of educational purpose.

Excellence in education is a concept that is employed loosely be many commentators about education or vocational education. It is a complex concept that only the uninformed consider as yielding to simple definitions. Excellence is easily attached to symbols of superiority, to the tests

of survival, regardless of the importance of the race being run. Perhaps it is because it is the nature of humans to find comfort in the tangible—that which can be counted, catalogued, catergorized, labeled, and scored. When faced with educational dilemmas, they are most likely to examine easily measurable variables or actions rather than the motivations, premises, or the philosophy that laid the foundation for the dilemma. This is especially true when it comes to examining excellence in education. If students cannot read, lack motivation, do not meet expected standards, or are unprepared for any useful next step in their lives, then the curricula, teachers, physical environment—all of these are examined and critiqued. What often goes unmentioned, is that the means of education may have become surrogate ends and that the ends of education may have been undervalued. It is in the realization of important ends of education that excellence may be found in all of its valuable variations.

The National Reports: The Atmosphere of Crisis

There is probably no area of American endeavor that is more difficult to comprehend or to confront than the tasks involved in developing an acceptable relationship between educational policy and educational practice. There are many who prefer this interaction to be direct, a relationship in which those with the authority to declare policy options can influence the nature of overall educational practice. There are also many who prefer a state of affairs in which there can be multiple sources of educational policy and many expressions of policy in its implementation as educational practice. The latter are not dismayed by a fragmentation of educational policy; they regard it as a virture. The only true test of freedom, they would argue, is its use, and the alternative—its disuse in education—is therefore the precursor of the demise of freedom itself. Local education agencies are likely to applaud, therefore, the absence of rigid federal policies.

While this debate continues, another change has come over the American scene, a change that is visible to everyone. Much of the American ethos has changed. Americans once saw themselves as individuals bound to each other and to their communities by a common fate, a common belief in achievable purposes not yet attained but worth the effort. Now a growing number of Americans see themselves bound to each other and to their communities by a common fear of foreign competition looming on the horizon and a need to seek protective measures and to control initiatives rather than to unleash them.

This new American ethos can be more dangerous than any threat on the horizon: it is dangerously self-deluding when people of any nation or similar community are encouraged to define their national interest or their educational purposes by protective mythologies or simplistic slogans. This is a part of the danger in the plethora of reports on the condition of American education. The *A Nation at Risk* report (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983) concept describes a looming danger that is tantamount to "unilateral disarmament," and it offers some preferred responses. It stops short, however, of informing citizens about how they can become informed about the processes of defining the interface between national interest and educational purpose. There are now more than two dozen such reports describing an American educational crisis and more are on the way.

The analysis of the various reports on the condition of education and its crisis status is not within the scope of this paper. Yet it is important to know how a reasonably well-informed and discerning citizen can or should view the flow of commentary about American education. Any policy perspective of excellence in vocational education is conditioned by the way in which citizens view these matters. In brief summary, therefore, the following sections will synthesize such a citizen view of these reports.

Values and Virtues

There are hopeful signs in the current interest in the education crisis. To the average citizen it may appear as a recurrent event, one of the periodic alarms over the condition of the nation's schools. On this occasion there are, however, some differences from previous alarms. Education appears to have been catapulted to the top of the national agenda. It has captured the attention of many who had heretofore been indifferent to the condition of education, especially those at state and national levels.

To the average citizen this is undoubtedly good news, but it is not unusual; education has always been at or near the top of the average citizen's public agenda. Their decisions have been positive—voting approval of bond issues for capital investments, balloting for representative governance, and responding to invitations to cooperate with schools. The average citizen knows that schools are extended arms of the state and that state legislatures try to create the illusion that resource limitations are local problems rather than state determined. It is, therefore, especially good news for the average citizen to know that education is high on the state agenda. But the remainder of the scene is not reassuring. Although education is high on our citizens' or our agenda, it is not high, indeed it may be low on the federal agenda; there is no indication that more resources or more leadership will be provided from the federal level to deal with the crisis. There is only the possibility that educational issues could become politicized, and thus even more polarized as a result of having a position high on the agenda of public affairs.

The positioning of education high on the national and state agenda during the current educational crisis has, however, yielded some vicarious benefits. Its elevation to front-page news and editorial commentary has offered additional reminders, particularly to those who have been long detached from the scene, that schooling has become a very complex activity. Schools have become receptacles for the problems of changing family structure, battlegrounds for the unresolved issues of race and social justice, and rest stops for a highly mobile population. Schools are staggering under the weight of an expanded assortment of added tasks that cannot be shifted elsewhere nor accommodated by changes in course prescriptions, instructional intensity, or by minor alterations in schedules.

Persistent Uncertainties

While the average citizen may be pleased with the possibility that education has won a higher position on the national agenda, there is also room for disenchantment with the uncertainties that persist despite most of the recent reports. Most discouraging is the difficulty of finding operational descriptions of excellence and, its corollary, the difficulty in differentiating between ends and means. A number of the reports* describe excellence as the existence of required core subjects, illustrated as a prescribed sequence of academic subjects required of all students. Such a means-oriented approach to excellence is based on the obvious premise that education is the process of prescribing unidimensional ways of cramming the most into students, rather than finding multidimensional ways of getting the most out of them. Such limited interpretations of excellence are discouragingly unimaginative, and they can be counted on to compound the extent of uncertainty.

Another area of uncertainty in the series of reports involves the compelling question of who should receive the dividends resulting from a higher investment in education? If education is a

*A considerable number of reports have emerged and more are underway, including these cited elsewhere in this paper as well as those by Boyer (1983), Goodlad (1983), The Education Equality Project (1983), and the National Opinion Research Center (1983)

benefit-creating exercise, how should these benefits be distributed and who should receive them? These are critically important questions. If education is envisaged as a unidimensional activity engaged in creating a pool of undifferentiated talent, then the dividends on the investment are most clearly seen as available to those who select from the pool and are external to it. If, on the other hand, education is envisaged as a multidimensional activity engaged in creating a pool of differentiated talent, then the dividends are most clearly seen as available to those who are in the pool.

The question of who receives the dividends on the investment in excellence is highly related to the incentive and reward system available to students or schools in their search for the elusive attribute of excellence. It is most easily illustrated with examples of students who are athletes and talented musicians; it is far more difficult to illustrate with the better than average student or excellent student in an academic area or in vocational education. The question of who benefits from the investment continues, therefore, as an uncertainty.

Conspicuous Gaps

More difficult for the average citizen to perceive, and perhaps more important to the outcome of the crisis, are the gaps or the voids in all or most of the recent reports on education. Gaps or voids are probably to be expected; most of the major inquiries began by assembling a panel or a committee of individuals having a special interest in the current state of affairs in American education. Each group identified the problems to be addressed, offered its best judgment regarding the solutions to these problems, and then advertised such solutions as widely as possible. Certainly the nation's other policies involving multijurisdictional governance, such as welfare, law enforcement, health care, or transportation, would not be addressed in this way. To a certain degree the gaps and voids become predictable on the basis of the expected perceptions of those who are members of the study groups or panels. What are the gaps and voids?

The first involves the structure of the American educational enterprise. With the continuing increase in the number of years young people spend in education, the educational enterprise has expanded to accommodate this and also the enrollment-generating nature of public educational financing. It should be no surprise, therefore, that the enterprise has become quantity conscious; it is the currency of institutional survival at all levels. Nor should it be any surprise to discover that the staggering load of expectations at the secondary level of education has been inherited from the higher education level where the proliferation is even greater. Except for a few hand-wringing observations about the need to raise entrance requirements for colleges and universities, the panels have been unable to see any defects in an overall system that has become design-poor and bureaucracy-rich (Swanson 1982).

Meanwhile, the concept of the comprehensive high school may have become an exaggerated myth. There are very few high schools that offer enough vocational education to include vocational sequences, and there are very few that can claim comprehensiveness in the nature of students served. American secondary education has become a class-conscious activity: schools located in the proximity of public housing projects are grossly different from schools located in suburbs.

Those concerned about educational reform appear to have been largely insulated from the reality of accelerating structural (that is to say, fundamental and long-term) change as a characteristic of the occupational structure. Often referred to as structural unemployment, the problem began to unfold in the early 1960s. From the period 1961 to 1980, the federal expenditure for totally

new structures to accommodate this accelerating change had risen to $16 billion annually. Much of it was devoted to skill training for unemployed youth, and most occurred outside of the school system.

As in the past with the Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), and now with the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) that follows up on the earlier legislation, these new structures have become a part of the policy and program framework for assisting America's youth. Existing as a safety net to accommodate the high attrition rate in America's school system, these new structures have an enormous effect on the changing structure of the school system; they offer legitimacy to the growth of an underclass within a multitiered, publicly supported education and training enterprise. It is almost inconceivable that these emerging structural configurations should have escaped the attention of so many who have attempted to offer solutions to America's educational crisis. This avoidance of attention to structure may not identify a problem; it may merely highlight a dilemma. The dilemma may involve the risk of acknowledging that our nation's fundamental belief in equality of educational opportunity may now be endangered by the entangling web of unquestioned bureaucratic structure.

Vocational education is the glaringly neglected aspect of most of the reports. With only a few exceptions (e.g., as in *Action for Excellence*, by the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth 1983) all consign it to the position of a residual claimant on student time or other resources. One wonders why there is such neglect. Is it a confirmation of the abandonment of purposes dealing with preparation for the world of work? Or is it acceptance of the proposition that excellence in vocational education cannot be achieved in the American educational enterprise? Whatever the reason, vocational education in most of the reports has been assigned the status of a side bet, a nonparticipant in the main game of the schools.

How should one summarize the reactions of informed citizen-observers to the recent reports? Perhaps the three most important questions that are being asked about education are (in reverse order of importance), what should be taught, to whom, and for what purpose? In a narrow-gauged and simplistic sort of way the reports of the task forces and commissions have responded to the first question; the next two, which should condition every answer to the first, are left untouched.

CHAPTER 2

THE FORCES AT WORK

When one observes the omission of vocational education from the reports of serious discussions regarding the reform of American education, one wonders whether it is, in fact, an omission or whether vocational education is regarded as a separate, or perhaps subsidiary, consideration. Is vocational education still viewed by many as an intruder on the scene of compulsory education, an activity that distorts or blemishes a preferred view of education? Is it possible that vocational education is viewed as an activity that exhibits its own cycles of reform and resurgence quite separate from the reform cycles of compulsory education?

There is evidence to indicate the existence of a persistent cultural and intellectual view that prefers a separate and subsidiary existence for vocational education and also that envisions a separate cycle of reform for the field. The question of whether this separatism should exist is an important policy consideration affecting excellence in preparing individuals for the world of work. The possibility of whether such separatism does exist is hardly open to question; it is a main feature of the milieu of education and training in America. Its significant features will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The Classical Tradition

The classical tradition continues to reappear and to dominate much of the American debate involving excellence in education at all levels. The word classical is somewhat vague, but the origins of classical education are quite clear. It emerged from periods of history that in retrospect, are known as classical periods. Most would agree that this includes the fifth century B.C., the age of Plato and Aristotle. Most would include the first century of Christianity, the age of Augustus, as well as a period that began in Europe about the seventeenth century and continues into the present.

Since there was no single classical period, the reference to its historical foundation is useful mainly to identify the durability of its influence and the significance of this influence to evolving policy. This influence should not be underestimated; it continues as a feature of educational thought and practice in all Western societies.

At its beginning the classical tradition endeavored to establish a careful separation between the value of knowing and the value of doing. Geometry, for example, was a subject to be known, not a subject to be utilized. As the classical tradition evolved, there was continuing debate about the appropriate subjects to be included for those pursuing an education. As the debate continued, certain subjects were added to the list of those regarded as appropriate.

The debate about appropriateness of subject matter led to agreements about deemphasis as well as emphasis. The separation of knowing from doing also led to separations of theory from util-

ity (often referred to as practice) and the separation of intellectual work from manual work. Agreement on what should be deemphasized was almost universal; it was vocationalism, a concept viewed initially in the classical tradition as a common enemy and later as a vagrant in need of redemption. Lamentations concerning the excesses of vocationalism continue to appear from those who now advocate the classical tradition. It appears, for example, in the *Paideia Proposal* (Adler 1982), a plan to redesign American education along classical lines, which would eliminate vocational education from the years of compulsory education. It proposes a recapturing of the classical tradition and unidimensional tracking of all students. Such lamentations also appear in *The Humanities in American Life* (1980), a report of the Commission of the Humanities. The commission expressed, however, an attitude of conciliation toward vocational education; it urged the enrichment of vocational offerings through longer courses of study in the humanities.

The central feature of the classical tradition is an ideological dedication and commitment to liberal arts courses, along with a categorical rejection or postponement of all instruction related to vocationalism or specialization. The central feature of the classical tradition is not the same as that of a liberal education, which has a goal that is fully embraced by advocates of vocational education. Advocates of vocational education do not see the need, however, for the merits of a liberal education as limited to, or necessarily preceded by, instruction in the classical liberal arts. The liberal arts have resisted reform, succumbed to their own highly limiting styles of specialization, and have remained aloof from the changing structures of society and its institutions.

Owing to its durability and its dominance in Western societies, the classical tradition has been a powerful force in all of education. The separations mentioned earlier—knowing from doing, theory from practice, and intellectual work from manual work—have become institutionalized in much of the Western world. These institutions have become agents for the norm-referencing of large categories or classes of humans. In his monumental effort to provide guidelines for the democratization of education, *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey (1961) lamented these separations and expressed the hope that they could be diminished when the results of educational experimentation were seen. Except at the level of preparation for the professions, this has not occurred. In most of the Western world, vocational or occupational preparation occurs in institutions that are separated from institutions claiming a classical tradition, and that are separated, furthermore, by its lower position in the hierarchy of status. The effect of the classical tradition, thus, is not solely on the curriculum of compulsory or further education; it has also been on the structure of education and the structure of society itself.

However, the effect of the classical tradition has not been universal. The effect on the structure of education and society has not been so pronounced in Europe's Eastern Socialist countries, in the USSR, or in the industrialized countries of the Far East. This observation adds to the complexity of getting an unpolarized view of the evolving role of classical tradition. It is well known that the classical tradition emerged from the cradle of many of the current interpretations of freedom. It is incongruous that now it begins to appear as the hotbed of frustration and despair—mainly because of its condescending view of education for work and its limited view of what can be liberating.

Education and Training

Not unrelated to its conspicuously transcendent influence is the fact that the classical tradition in Western societies is the chief influence on the dichotomy involving education and training. Often the terms are used interchangeably as if they were synonymous. Yet their growing separateness is sufficient to be regarded as a fundamental policy determinant in vocational education.

The separateness is particularly marked in Western European countries and in Third World countries having the colonial influence of Europe or America. One finds, for example, separate institutions identified for training the work force and for educating the populace. Vocational education is often appended uncomfortably to one or the other.

International organizations maintain a similar kind of separation between education and training. The International Labor Organization (ILO) identifies with training and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) identifies with education. Disagreement abounds between the two organizations and among the member countries of the two organizations regarding the most appropriate organizations for implementation of vocational preparation. Yet the terminology and the conceptual framework remain discrete: UNESCO refers to it as vocational education, and the ILO refers to it as vocational training.

In the 1980 *Review of Youth Employment Policies in the United States* prepared by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (1980), the education-versus-training cleavage within the United States was additionally highlighted. The itinerary arranged for the European reviewers required an expenditure of more than 90 percent of their time reviewing training policy and about 10 percent of their time examining educational policy, both related to youth unemployment. This disproportion was sufficient to reveal, nevertheless, the extent to which the viewed and the viewer alike were oriented to the separate nature of education and training. They commented, for example, on "the somewhat strained relationships that have undoubtedly existed both at the national and local levels between the education system and those responsible for employment policy" (p. 48).

Within the United States the separateness of education and training is a constitutional issue, education being a function left to the states and training a function without such constitutional boundaries. The consequential bifurcation is hardly unexpected: training develops through one channel of government bureaucracy, usually the U.S. Department of Labor, and education develops through another, usually the agencies of education. The instructional activities they foster are often identical, with difference occurring only occasionally in the purpose or length of training.

Long and Short Education

An effectively disguised aspect of the natural dynamics of education and training policy is the segregating influence associated with length of education or training. This segregation is disguised by organization of American education by dividing schooling into administratively convenient categories, namely, elementary, secondary, and higher education. Along with the claim that such an arrangement will accommodate equality of educational opportunity, a formal educational structure has risen to sustain the classification and to reflect the claim. Yet for most Americans, including the bulk of those entering service and skilled occupations, there is a de facto classification that more clearly represents reality. It is simply *long* and *short* education (Swanson 1982). Long education consumes a much higher level of public expenditure per student; it allows time for the acquisition of many more employability skills, and it leads to the higher positions in the occupational structure involving higher status and higher rewards. Short education, on the other hand, consumes a much lower level of public expenditure per student; it leads to the lower positions in the occupational structure having lower status and more meager rewards. It also involves a grossly disproportionate number of those who are poor or otherwise disadvantaged. A significant number of those who receive a short education are the dropouts, which was about 26 percent of the teenage population in the early 1980s.

The presence of a long education for some and a short education for most is rarely confronted in the discussions of excellence in American education. The implied assumption is that the structure and program of the educational enterprise are neutral; they merely serve to accommodate the segregation and attrition that is natural. Thus, education is expected to be long for some and short for others. There is no way to disguise the reality of the difference that exists in the cost of, consequence of, and nature of those served by the two patterns of education. Nor is there any way of disguising the reality that vocational education or training is conventionally perceived as delayed or subsidiary to long education. Only a few of the forms of vocational study such as apprenticeships and the preparation for the professions can be regarded as exceptions to the long-short anomaly.

Policy Action and Reaction: A Summary

Taken together, the three forces identified in this section—the classical tradition, the separateness of education and training, and the de facto separation of American education into long and short dimensions—are among the most powerful policy determinants in the nation today. They have influenced the structure of the nation's institutions and, in consequence, the structure of society itself. It is the contention of this paper that these three forces operate with interactive singularity and that they have more influence on an emerging concept of educational excellence than any other forces at work.

Only once in the nation's history was there an educational reform to thwart and to bridle the influence of the classical tradition, the separation of education and training and the restriction of opportunity enforced by the traditions creating long and short education. This reform was the highly controversial Morrill Act of 1862, the highly misunderstood Land Grant Act. The reform was a limited success and in many ways a temporary achievement.

Since this paper urges a renewal of the intent of the reform imbedded in the Morrill Act, it is important here to point out what was controversial about it and what is still misunderstood. It was controversial, first of all, because it had a clear focus on *who* should be educated as well as *what* should be taught. The *who* involved those who had previously obtained a very short education, those in the lower classes. It was highly controversial to think of elevating agriculture and mechanics (engineering) to full professional status. Second, it was controversial because it began to break down the distinctions between classical studies and vocationalism and between education and training. Each was to be included "in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life" (Warren and Slater 1983, p. 65).

It was so controversial that it won a presidential veto in 1859, but it was again passed by Congress in 1862 with a majority made possible by the secession of eighteen southern states from the Union. The most striking and controversial aspect of the act was the fact that an entirely new educational structure was created to accommodate the reform; the possibility of reforming existing institutions was apparently regarded as out of the question.

What is misunderstood? It is frequently presumed that the reform occurred to add something which had not existed rather than to reform what existed. In fact, the intent was the latter. In some ways the reform was revolutionary and far reaching, and in other ways it was very limited. In terms of limitations, reform had almost no effect on stimulating comparable reforms in the institutions of education below the college level. It was, therefore, a limited success because of this limited scope. However, far-reaching effects of the Morrill Act are still present today in institutions that embody a wholesale reform focusing dually on excellence and equality.

It should be observed, however, that no educational reform initiative has occurred in the last century to equal the Morrill Act in either its scale, focus, or style of policy implementation. It initiated a new category of institutions with missions designed to change the course of educational purpose as well as to serve categories of citizens who had been outsiders to the American educational enterprise. Policy implementation did not occur by demanding compliance; it occurred by providing assistance in the creation of subsidiary policies encapsulated in the missions of institutions. Reforms in more recent years have focused more on remediation, compliance, and monitoring and less on system-wide efforts to prevent, rather than to remedy, problems.

CHAPTER 3

SOURCES OF THE POLICY PROBLEM: MULTIPLE POLICIES AND UNCERTAIN PURPOSES

Much is expected of an educational system, including its vocational components. First, it is expected to improve individuals' quality of life by enhancing their attainment of such basics as food, clothing, and shelter, as well as elevating their appreciation for and contribution to cultural enrichment, security, and freedom. Second, it is expected to serve the needs of society: by preparing individuals for the tasks to be performed in the occupational structure, for the forms and norms of acceptable social and economic behavior, and for the collective intent expressed as community goal seeking, including among other things, the ability to be competitively productive. Third, it is expected to be creative in altering the environment itself, in increasing its capacity to utilize a growing array of technical resources, technological advances, intellectual leadership, and other consequences expected to flow from the purposes of education and training. All of this, it should be added, is expected within the context of the dual goals of equality and excellence.

The Concept of Excellence

In retrospect, it is not surprising that the United States, along with many other countries in the Western world, has recently become disenchanted with its educational system. By the mid-1960s and through the entire decade of the 1970s, it was clear that the promises of education were not being realized; education was handicapped by both its successes and its failures.

The successes occurred in the extent to which schools imparted competencies and, by necessity, therefore created differences. Small differences (e.g., biological, intellectual) that exist at the beginning of a child's education are accentuated, not diminished, by subsequent education. This differentiating power of education is often seen in the way schools move the children of the same parents at different rates along the same path. As mentioned previously in this paper, schools that are expected to be equalizers are much more successful as differentiators; they are busily engaged in identifying, reinforcing, and legitimizing the differences that students possess at the outset.

The failure of education is that its success in differentiating has been employed along a single dimension, usually reflecting what is academically traditional in both instruction and in content. Schools function with the illusion that they are at their best when they teach what is the most easily packaged, sequenced, scheduled, and measured. Schools are, after all, highly bureaucratic establishments that are structured to operate with a standardized array of interchangeable parts (e.g., classrooms, subjects, teachers, textbooks, and examinations) organized usually along a single dimension. Parts that are not easily interchangeable are usually undervalued.

The imminent and potential failure of education might have been predictable if it had been realized that creativity, inventiveness, discovery, serendipity, or courage does not exist along a single dimension. An educational system that is out of sync with the theoretical and practical prob-

lems ranging across a country's present and potential occupational structure and that does not differentiate students along multiple dimensions will be in constant search of simple solutions to the complex problems of articulating an educational structure with an occupational structure.

A second and perhaps more critical aspect of this failure is the often-unquestioned premise that the single dimension of education, the classically oriented academic dimension, is the essential prerequisite or the needed prior instruction for all other dimensions. Where students might have become familiar with the scientific and technical world during their school-going years, it is delayed or, for dropouts, omitted. Disguised by the unidimensional as well as prerequisite interpretations of such concepts as *basic*, core, or *fundamental*, great numbers of students have little opportunity to link theory with utility, science with technology, or education with work.

Fortunately, there are contemporary, large-scale examples of attempts to achieve excellence in vocational education. Great Britain is the country now engaged in a far-reaching reassessment of its education successes and failures ("Britain Debates" 1983). The country's hoped-for successes have been dramatic. Enrollment of both boys and girls in science and mathematics courses has been rising steadily for two decades. Examination scores have been improving in virtually all science and mathematics subjects. In terms of the number of Nobel prizes in relation to population, Great Britain leads the entire world.

With all of this apparent success, an educational crisis has arisen in Great Britain that now points to the failure of the system, namely, that the accepted measures of quality are illusory; better measures of excellence are needed. The degree of consensus in the country is astonishing; it now includes the Royal Society, the sixteen-thousand-member Association for Science Education, a major panel of experts that has recently concluded a report on the teaching of mathematics, and those in the new National Department of Trade and Industry.

The target of the anxiety and the criticism, not surprisingly, is the curriculum, its content, and its approach to instruction. The curriculum and the teachers are always the first target of criticism and anxiety. But those making commentary and criticism in Great Britain are no longer concerned with subjects: they are concerned with excellence that is identified with a purpose. The commentary laments the "chasm opened up over the last century between the world of education and the world of work," and the "mode in which too much weight is given to the thinking man's approach to problems rather than the doing man's approach." With particular respect to mathematics it says education should "enable each pupil to develop the mathematical skills and understanding required for adult life, for employment, and for further study and for training" (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 1980).

This criticism is also a discovery, a discovery that a pattern of success within the framework of the classical tradition is not an adequate expression of excellence in a modern setting. It is a discovery that how things are taught and to whom is as important as what is taught. Finally, it is a discovery that the simplistic solutions to curriculum reform offered in the *A Nation at Risk* report and in the plethora of similar reports are not sufficiently related to a durable concept of excellence.

The discovery in Britian has led to an interesting solution: compensatory education, a massive infusion of funds for technical and vocational education for all fourteen- to eighteen-year-olds. New courses in technical skills will be introduced *to compensate* for lack of practical training in useful skills provided by the traditional school science and mathematics curricula. Yet there is fear on the horizon, fear that, consciously or unconsciously, there will be a diversion of the more- or the less-able students toward such courses, which will thus widen still further the split between *thinking* and *doing*, the fundamental flaw in the current system. It is already clear, therefore, that the absence of structural reform may defeat the good intentions of curricular reform.

There are two important conclusions to be drawn here. The first is that popular interpretations of excellence tend to become casual explanations of selective superiority as well as justifications for the creation of rules and requirements to reinforce the selectivity. Such interpretations are influential, thus, in the structure, curriculum, and processes of education. They are powerful shapers of policy. Second, there is recurring controversy about excellence—its uses and its access routes. The appropriate definition of excellence is, therefore, a major policy problem for all of education, including vocational education.

The Form and Incidence of Policy

Policies exist in many forms and arise in numerous locations. Policies are ordinarily thought of as superordinate declarations of intent with some kind of legitimizing momentum. The legitimizing momentum may be provided by executive action, judicial order, legislation, or acquiescence to forces that are thought to be natural, unreconciliable, and thus conventional. History is replete with examples of the latter including slavery, child labor, racial discrimination, the subordinate role of women, and the identification of vocational education and/or training with the institutions and functions of charity. It is a main argument of this paper that acquiescence to such conventions continues to be the most powerful determinant of policy for vocational education. Such conventions are powerful in diminishing the value of the useful arts while elevating the value of the liberal arts, relegating vocational education to *short* education while urging *long* education for the classical tradition and viewing excellence as subjects to be studied rather than purposes to be served. The power of this policy determinant is that it shapes the structure of institutions, the conventional expectations we have of these institutions, and their exclusive nature.

There is another category of policy determinants represented by ongoing legislative, judicial, and executive action. This occurs at federal, state, and local levels. Policies emerging from the various levels may influence vocational education indirectly or directly. There may be an indirect influence on vocational education, for example, from legislation and subsequent policies intended to have a direct affect on social security, employment, training, or the tax code. Finally, there is a category of policy action intended to have a direct influence on vocational education—the legislative, judicial, and executive actions that specifically address vocational education at local, state, and federal levels.

In addition to convention as a major source of the policy problem in vocational education, there is the perennial problem of the *status* of the various policy levels or, rather, the status of the legitimizing momentum. Is the local level subordinate to the state level and is the state level subordinate to the federal level? To what degree is there subordination or superordination at these levels? Uncertainty with respect to the answers to these questions is the source of continuing policy problems. The uncertainty is compounded when the focus is on purposes of vocational education: the various levels appear to have quite different perceptions of purposes.

It might be expected that interaction among the three policy levels—federal, state, and local—would be highly important in a federated republic claiming a high degree of self-determination at local levels. Yet very little is known about such interaction; much of it is disguised as the problem of securing compliance with federal law.

Even if the status of policy initiatives were not in doubt and if all levels of vocational education were subordinate to the federal level, the form of the policy initiative would, nevertheless, be a source of policy problems affecting excellence. Consider, for example, the following four illustrative forms of possible federal policy initiative:

- **A form of policy for creating knowledge to ensure that policy purposes can be implemented.** It is one thing for the federal government to declare a policy purpose requiring more excellence in the education of disadvantaged and handicapped individuals. It is quite another to mandate and secure compliance with a classroom-level methodology such as requiring an individual educational plan (IEP). The former urges a policy purpose requiring a growing body of professional knowledge. The latter assumes that the route to excellence is known, that it can be mandated in federal law, and that the schools may be the enemy of students until compliance with a federally mandated classroom methodology is secure. Since the knowledge required to achieve excellence cannot be inherent in a federal policy nor in the procedures of confrontation to enforce it, a preferred approach may be to establish a policy purpose and to assist in creating the essential knowledge to achieve it. Such a policy form is rarely used.

- **A form of policy requiring the development of supporting policies at subsidiary levels.** Such a form would acknowledge the role and status of policy initiatives by policy-making bodies at subsidiary levels. Certain incentives could be available, for example, to local education agencies that adapt policies identified with the search for excellence. Such a policy form is, likewise, rarely used.

- **A form of policy that results in rules and regulations requiring compliance at subsidiary levels.** Such a form is generally limited to what can be easily enforced, regulated, and reported. The temptation here is to seek indicators of compliance rather than indicators of excellence. There is no evidence that federally mandated procedures can have much positive effect on the atmosphere of a classroom setting. Yet such policy forms are often used. Much of federal policy is expressed through extremely explicit legislation as if there were little or no professional or administrative responsibility.

- **A form of policy that identifies desirable policy purposes and that provides incentives for creating or altering the educational structures needed to achieve such purposes.** This is the policy form used in the implementation of the Morrill Act of 1862 and in the creation of military academies, as well as in the provision of the institutional support to assist the federal missions related to space exploration and defense. It has not been used as a policy form for influencing the preparation of the general work force since the Morrill Act.

It is quite clear that federal policy intiatives can take a variety of forms with consequences directly related to the form chosen as well as to the extent of mutual respect available among the jurisdictions affected by the policy intiatives. Any neglect of the importance of these matters is likely to thwart the consequences of policy initiatives.

Compliance, Assistance, and Advice

The translation of federal policy initiatives into administrative strategies involves three general approaches—compliance, assistance, and advice. *Compliance* is the strategy employed to ensure that funding formulas are followed—to ensure that prescribed procedures are employed and that specified target groups are served. An example from current vocational legislation (P.L. 94-482) would be the funding formulas for the different parts of the act.

Assistance is the strategy employed as an attempt to achieve a useful interface and interaction between federal and subsidiary policy initiatives. Assistance is employed, for example, in supplementing state funding formulas and in allocating federal funding for the functions of planning and

administration. As a complement to financial assistance, technical assistance is essentially nonexistent at federal or state levels: it is not supported by technical competencies available within staffing patterns.

Advice is the strategy that is carried out by requiring the plethora of advisory committees at federal, state, and local levels. The existence of advisory committees with federally mandated representation of specified interest groups is a measure of congressional mistrust of the democratic process as this process is implemented through locally elected boards of education and state governance procedures. It is also a measure of federal uncertainty about the nature of policies that might be effective in achieving the purposes of vocational education. Advisory committees are effective to the degree that they can allay this mistrust and can address the uncertainties. Using such committees is an arduous task because it is difficult to get local and state jurisdictions to take responsibility when it is necessary to comply with advisory strategies intended to undermine that responsibility.

Of the various policy approaches initiated at the federal level, advisory committees may be the most inadequately designed and therefore the most dysfunctional at all subsidiary levels. Instead of adding redundancy to the governance function, they could, if appropriately constituted, provide needed communication between the employment market and the program of vocational education. The much-needed communication is messages about the specific rewards available for specified types of performance in the work setting. *A Nation at Risk* report recommends for example, that all secondary students take four years of foreign language. An appropriately constituted and instructed advisory committee could provide advice about whether and how much (more or less) employers are willing to pay for four years of foreign language or, say, four years of electronics theory. The curriculum decision, whether to provide instruction in foreign language or electronic theory or both, is an appropriate decision for a governance body and its staff. Messages from advisory committees that indicate a market response (e.g., rates of pay or wages for specific kinds of performance) would be very helpful in informing those making the governance decision.

A major conclusion of the *Vocational Education Study*, the congressional-mandated study of vocational education carried out by the National Institute of Education (1981), under the direction of Henry David, was that vocational education has an overloaded goal structure, and is a highly decentralized and diverse enterprise with numerous and varied expectations at different levels. It was a comprehensive and orderly study of the system effects of the 1976 vocational education legislation. A similarly comprehensive and orderly study of vocational education policies has not been undertaken. It is difficult to see how it is possible to understand the influence of the various forms and strategies of vocational education policy on the purposes of the field until such an inquiry can be mounted. Meanwhile, one can only assume that the policy structure of vocational education is as cluttered as its goal structure.

CHAPTER 4

SOME POLICY ALTERNATIVES

A nation's vocational education policy is the product of the policies in all of the education and training institutions and agencies that influence vocational education. Every advanced nation has a vocational education policy, just as it has a fiscal policy and a foreign policy. Such a policy is judged by the values it serves and the purposes it achieves. Moreover, it is impossible not to have a vocational education policy. Even a do-it-yourself variety of rudderless drifting should be regarded as a conscious choice among a number of alternatives.

The policy alternatives to be considered here are those that may be considered as options at the federal level. It is the federal level, after all, which can create the climate for informed policy choice.

Nature of the Federal Role

The initial policy choice at the federal level involves the question of whether the federal role should be strong or weak. Such a choice hardly seems realistic. Given such a choice, who wouldn't opt for a strong role? The choice is not a simple one. A strong role requires some insulation from the politics of special interest and the vagaries of partisan politics while preserving democratic accountability. Moreover, it requires vigilance to be primacy of ends over means and the courage to identify policy alternatives and create the conditions for allowing subsidiary jurisdictions to make informed decisions about them. It is not a casual decision; a strong role follows directly from strong leadership.

The Question of Excellence

It is no longer possible to disguise the fact that federal policy for vocational education involves alternatives that lead to the standards of quality and excellence in the field. Nor is it possible to disguise the fact that American education has intensified its tracking of students on the basis of socioeconomic class, occupational interest, and ability to survive in an academic atmosphere.

Only a generation ago it was considered absurd to regard racial segregation in public schools as a violation of constitutional rights. How long is it possible to sustain the absurdity of the segregating influences of education or training programs *designed* for some to be short term, less expensive, and, for many, nonexistent? The dropout rate can be as good a measure of excellence as the scholastic survival rate; each is an indicator of educational policy and values endorsed thereby. The policy alternatives, therefore, are those of defining excellence and deciding how to pursue it.

The Form of Federal Policy Initiatives

Earlier in this paper there was a discussion of the various forms of policy initiative. Since they lead to quite different consequences in relation to subsidiary levels of policy development or implementation, they are policy alternatives to be considered. They are—

- policies intended to create knowledge to ensure that policy purposes may be implemented,
- policies requiring the development of supporting policies at subsidiary levels,
- policies that result in rules or regulations requiring compliance at subsidiary levels, and
- policies that lead to the creation or alteration of the structures through which policy purposes may be achieved.

Alternative forms of policy initiatives require certain kinds of incentives and/or penalties in order to ensure implementation. The choice of the alternative usually determines the nature of incentive and/or penalty.

Alternatives for Structural Change

Structural change is always threatening to entrenched guilds and to comfortable bureaucracies. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that structural change often has more adversaries than advocates. Even after more than two decades of structural unemployment, undiminishing youth unemployment, and one of the highest dropout rates in the industrial world, there have been no significant, response-oriented changes in the structure of the American educational enterprise. Indeed, the occupational structure and the educational structure appear to have an inimical relationship: each creates an outer shell to keep from being wounded by the other.

To be effective, structural change must be of considerable magnitude in order to avoid dilution by adversaries or minimum accommodation by advocates. A few of these alternatives follow:

- An enlistment of the entire educational enterprise, including, most particularly, institutions of higher education, in the task of renewing the promise of the Morrill Act, particularly in ways that will address quality and excellence for those choosing to enter occupations.
- An acceptance of the trend toward the functional separateness, dilution, and lowered priority of vocational education in comprehensive educational settings and provision of incentives for its reemergence in separate settings with its own purposes and functional integrity, for example, in the nation's approximately 225 special technical high schools and postsecondary technical institutes.
- Provision of incentives for the creation of special structures for instructor preparation: the adaptation of science, mathematics, and instruction in theory to technological development; and for inquiry designed to inform policy.

CHAPTER 5

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of this paper are focused directly on the goal of achieving excellence in vocational education, as viewed from a policy perspective. Before examining these recommendations, readers should again review the purpose-oriented definitional elements of vocational education provided in the introduction of this paper, as well as the discussion on the educational system's record of trying to respond to patchwork policies for the last two decades. The field now functions in the climate of an educational crisis in which vocational education is regarded by many as only a side bet. It is quite possible, therefore, that the situation will need to become worse before it becomes better, that national productivity will become even more pronounced, and that the educational structure will become even more irrelevant to the occupational structure.

The following recommendations flow directly from the policy alternatives suggested in the previous section of this paper.

- **The federal role in vocational education should be strong rather than weak.** A strong role is one that calls for identifying and justifying ends to be achieved rather than means or methods of fostering achievement. Providing incentives for achieving ends allows the generation of strength leading toward maximum performance, whereas requiring compliance with methodological mandates leads to accountability for minimums.

- **The federal role in vocational education should focus on the development of policies to encourage excellence in preparing individuals for the world of work.** Included in such a policy might be a continuing analysis of the costs of not moving toward excellence, of continuing the segregating influences of vocational education, and of tolerating the recurring costs of the nation's enormous dropout rate from secondary schools. The policy initiative should be one that defines excellence and decides how it can be achieved in a modern democracy.

- **The form of policy initiative that calls for compliance with federally determined implementation proscriptions should be abandoned.** It erodes initiative and professionalism at subsidiary levels. Instead, federal policy initiatives should—

  -invite and provide incentives for supporting policies at subsidiary levels,

  -create knowledge to illuminate and inform policy decisions at subsidiary levels, and

  -provide incentives for creating new structures through which policy purposes may be achieved.

- **A new and stronger federal role should establish policy initiatives of the magnitude of the Morrill Act to renew the promise of that act.** The policy initiatives should include serving the lower socio-economic classes with longer education, more integration of theory and utility, and the closing of the chasms between education and training. This recommendation may require massive structural change, including, as in the case of the Morrill Act, an entirely new system of institutions.

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