Journal of Vocational and Technical Education

Editor:
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Volume 16, Number 1 **Fall 1999**

A Tribute to the Visionaries, Prime Movers and Pioneers of Vocational Education, 1892 to 1917

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Abstract

As the 19th century drew to its close, the U.S. was behind the Europeans so far as training programs that would give adequate under girding to the advances taking place in the industrial world. Manual training and apprenticeship programs were inadequate. A new concept and approaches were needed to meet the demands of manufacturing. The concept of vocational education then emerged. The visionaries of vocational education sensed that the American public school was the place to develop this new approach. This manuscript recalls the early history of how vocational education became a link in America's education and pays tribute to the pioneers whose vision and work led to the phenomenon that buttress the American economy. Hopefully, this recall will encourage its readers to honor these pioneers as significant contributors of the 20th century as the close of the millennium is celebrated.

It is not the intention of this paper to minimize in any way the great industrial and technical advances this nation made and was making as the 19th century drew to its close. However, the rapid changes into an industrial-type society called for a different approach for use in training more of the population in a setting corresponding to these advances. Manual training brought the nation as far as the beginning of vocational education in the United States, but it did not sufficiently under gird the factory system so that it could stem the tide of the industrial advances. The Depression of 1892-93 revealed that the factory system needed a more functional approach for preparing workers for the developing technological society. It is to pay tribute to the people who caught the vision of what vocational education was to contribute to this nation that this

paper is dedicated.

As the 20th century draws to its close, educators and students of vocational education are encouraged to pay tribute to those individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions whose efforts contributed in laying the foundation on which future vocational education/technology can advance into the 21st century. It would do us well to honor them for their efforts as we celebrate the close of the millennium.

The material presented here is intended to serve as a recall for educators and students of vocational education, but it will also serve to inform other readers of the place vocational education and the pioneers, who made it possible, hold in American education. A recall of how vocational education became a part of the curriculum of the public secondary schools reveals how these visionaries of the 19th and early 20th centuries rightly viewed the impact vocational education was to have on the economic development of this nation. Credit is given to the pioneers for the initial efforts, which developed into what is now vocational education in the United States. The work of John D. Runkle and Calvin M. Woodward, with their development of the Della Vos' method as a manual training program, has been documented by Bennett (1926) and Lannie (1967).

Effects of Inadequate Training

The 19th century closed with omens of a problem which administrators of the public secondary schools did not visualize--the ineffectiveness of the apprenticeship system that could not cope with the rapidly developing industrial technological advances of the nation (Seybolt, 1917). During this period, the education system at the secondary level continued its tradition of teaching students to conjugate Greek and Latin verbs for six or seven years. This was a period when private and public secondary schools combined served slightly more than 7% of high school students (Woodward, 1887). Educators at the college and university levels realized the technological preparation necessary to develop and advance the infrastructures of the nation. However, visions for laying the necessary foundation at the secondary level fell short. By 1886, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) was already organized, having emerged from its own difficulties with the Knights of Labor, managers of the factory system, and the failing apprenticeship system (Taft, 1957). Even up to 1892, this condition of the failing apprenticeship system did not prevent the National Education Association (NEA) Committee of Ten, headed by Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard University, from developing a model high school program with four major areas of concentration: classical, Latin-scientific, modern language, and English (Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies, 1894).

By 1893, the nation was engulfed in an economic depression in which many manufacturers were ruined or badly shaken. Massachusetts's manufacturers recalled then, that since the World's Fair in Paris in 1867, English and American manufacturers discovered their wares were inferior to those produced on the continent of Europe (Wirth, 1980). This condition of American manufacturers had been a matter of some concern since the beginning of the Civil War. This whole experience heightened the awareness of the nation for a formal training program that would enhance the efforts of the factory system. The manufacturers, having experienced the negative effect of the Depression and the failing apprenticeship system, were impelled to come together as a group.In 1895, they were officially organized as the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) to strive in the face of economic depression. They immediately joined in the struggle for a new direction in education (National Association of Manufacturers, 1895).

Approaches for Solution

As the training issue became more apparent, in 1905, the Massachusetts legislature sensed the importance of the issue and created the Douglas Commission on Industrial Education to inquire

into the advisability of establishing its own industrial schools. The Commission reviewed the existing inequities of the public school system and found it too literary in scope and method. The findings of the Commission were distributed nationwide, and increasing numbers of people viewed the problem in national and international dimensions (Report of the Commission on Industrial and Technical Education, 1906). The AFL also became a prime mover in the struggle for a more effective training program, since skilled workers were more likely to swell its ranks at that time. The NAM sensed its predicament, especially as it espoused a different philosophy from that of the AFL. Although they had visions of the same outcome--a functional school system, the NAM leaders were contending that training crucial to its existence could be obtained only in an expanded system of private trade schools based on the German model (National Association of Manufacturers, 1898). The AFL leaders continued to emphasize that a study should be conducted to ascertain the most appropriate approach to training. While the incentive, which motivated both the NAM and the AFL, was their dissatisfaction with the public secondary school, the AFL considered a course essential to maintain its own existence. It believed that the working classes should share in the wealth of the nation; that its duty, therefore, was to monitor the making of such wealth and the treatment of workers.

The AFL believed that enhancing existing programs might solve the nation's dilemma and that an exhaustive study of this should be undertaken. Charles Richards of Teachers' College, Columbia University, believed that a whole new approach was necessary and that such approach should include Federal Government participation with the states. Richards realized that the AFL was interested in ascertaining the strengths of existing training programs. He encouraged Samuel Gompers, the leader of the AFL, to authorize a Commission for pursuing that course. In 1908, Gompers authorized the Mitchell Commission charged with the responsibility of making an exhaustive investigation of approaches to industrial education in this country and abroad (American Federation of Labor, 1908; Senate Document No. 336, 1911-1912).

Through various committees, the Commission focused its attention on the subjects of apprenticeship, the career lives of graduates of trade schools, manual training programs and schools of technology (Senate Document No. 336, 1911-1912). Efforts on the part of all groups concerned for a solution, elicited a nationwide dialogue on how to approach the problem of training a skilled work force capable of meeting current needs.

A President's Appeal

Since 1902, the distinguished voice of President Theodore Roosevelt was heard on the subject of vocational education.He emphasized, "America contended for the markets of the world, but its most formidable competitors were the nations with the most highly developed business ability and skill." The countries of greatest industrial efficiency would win the prize, he contended. However, according to the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, Bulletin No. 3 (1907), the President continued that the American public school system failed to give the industrial training, which fits a man for the shop and the farm. High-quality schools were developed for the people at the top, with engineering schools ranking with the best in Europe. The President noted "but almost nothing was done to equip the private soldiers of the industrial army--the mechanic, the metal worker, and the carpenter" (National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, Bulletin No. 3, 1907,). An education which provided industrial intelligence would add dignity to labor, provide protection against immigrant job competitors, and provide for workers and farmers formal educational programs equivalent to those already available to professionals and managerial groups.

While the AFL, the NAM, the Douglas Commission, the Mitchell Commission and President Roosevelt, among others, alerted the nation of the need for a formal training program, the issues of where and how continued to be debated. Out of this dilemma emerged a new organization to lead the way in securing federal participation for the new approach centered in the concept--

vocational education.

The Emergence of a New Group

In 1906, the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education (NSPIE) was organized. Charles R. Richards of Teachers' College, Columbia University, and James P. Haney, Director of the New York City Public School Manual Training Program, were among its visionaries, prime movers, and original organizers. At the organizational meeting on November 16, 1906, in Cooper Union, New York, the members chose Henry S. Pritchett as president; M. W. Alexander vice-president; V. Everit Macy, treasurer; and Charles R. Richards, secretary. The officers then elected a 27-member Board of Managers with Milton P. Higgins as its head. The Board was comprised of manufacturers and educators, as well as representatives of organized labor and social workers. Under their skillful leadership, one of the major political objectives of the NSPIE, "to unite the many forces making toward industrial education the country over" was partially realized (National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, Bulletin No. 1, 1907,). This was indeed a move for unification.

In 1908, the NSPIE held its first convention. It decided then that the securing of federal funding for vocational education was another objective to be realized. At one of the conventions of the NSPIE held between 1908 and 1911, Pritchett presented an influential presentation, which impressed the delegates to the extent that they voted to transmit to the President of the United States and the Congress his presentation that stressed the importance of vocational education to the economic welfare of the nation. The leaders of the NSPIE, having made their initial unification move at the organizational meeting, now decided to enlist the support of the NAM and the AFL, among others, to work toward federal funding for public secondary vocational education (National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, Bulletin No. 1, 1911).

About this time, the NAM realized, from its own cost accounting, that private vocational schools, which it sought to establish on the German model, were not feasible and dropped its early allegiance to such private trade schools. It decided to work for trade training at public expense (National Association of Manufacturers, 1911). The AFL, after much deliberations and an examination of its situation with respect to the report of the Mitchell Commission, also decided to work for vocational education at public expense. By 1912, with attention focused on the role the Federal Government should play, the NSPIE employed as its Executive Secretary, Charles Prosser, an effective and powerful lobbyist, whose efforts were well known in Massachusetts (Cremin, 1961; Senate Document No. 845, 1911-1912). Thus the stage was set for the political movements leading to federal involvement.

Summary

The changing pace of industry found the nation without adequately prepared workers to meet the needs of manufacturers and to stem the advance of European goods into the markets of the United States. The Depression of the 1890's exacerbated the condition, and the need for better training became evident. Many voices were then raised in consideration of a new conceptual approach.

The manufacturers, represented by the NAM, realized that there was a need for a formally trained group of blue-collar workers. Its leaders sensed that with Federal Government participation, it would be more advantageous for them than to be involved with private trade schools. The AFL realized that, since formal training would be best for the economic development of the country and the well being of the workers, it would be in its interest to support the participation of the Federal Government with the states.

The concern of President Roosevelt and several other parties and the reports of both the Douglas and Mitchell Commissions alerted the country of the need for training the unskilled human

resources, many of whom were idle at a time when the nation needed a skilled work force. With this sense of unification, the parties were ready to approach the Congress for federal legislation that would mandate federal aid to vocational education in the secondary schools of the nation.

Efforts Leading to Federal Legislation

Since the objective of this paper is to pay tribute to individuals, organizations and the Federal Government, it is necessary to present the short history of the initial effort made by the AFL to involve the Congress. The AFL drafted the first bill of interest for vocational education to reach the Congress. The AFL requested Senator Jonathan P. Dolliver of Iowa, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, to sponsor the bill. In January 1910, the bill was introduced in the Senate by Senator Dolliver. At the same time, Representative Charles R. Davis of Minnesota introduced a companion bill in the House. This bill made some progress in Congress during the first half of 1910, but Congress adjourned on June 25 without taking action. Senator Dolliver died in October 1910; therefore, the bill did not advance in the Senate (Senate Hearings before the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, 1910). The House version of the bill continued to progress as the Davis bill but found new support by 1912. After the death of Senator Dolliver, efforts were made by Representative Davis to keep the bill alive. In the political process, however, the substance of the bill came to be reintroduced as the Smith-Lever bill.

In 1912, the NSPIE found sponsors in Congress to work for its vocational education legislation. Senator Carroll S. Page of Vermont and Congressman William B. Wilson of Pennsylvania agreed to co-sponsor a bill in close collaboration with Charles Prosser, the Executive Secretary of the NSPIE. Their initial efforts led to the shaping of Bill S-3. The Bill provided federal aid to industrial, agricultural, and home economics education in secondary schools. However, the substance of the Dolliver-Davis bill was now introduced as the Smith-Lever bill. This bill co-sponsored simultaneously with Bill S-3 and had much the same intent as the Page-Wilson bill, but it did not provide for secondary schools, as did Bill S-3. This opened the way for a political deadlock. On one hand, the Democratic House refused to vote favorably for the Page-Wilson bill. Likewise, the Republican Senate refused to vote favorably for the Smith-Lever bill. This struggle continued in Congress for three years (Senate Document No. 845, 1911-1912).

Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia, who could not persuade a majority in the Senate to vote for the Smith-Lever bill, was interested in vocational education at public expense and knew that this was what the NSPIE wanted. Congressman Dudley M. Hughes of Georgia, Chairman of the House Committee on Education, found himself in a similar situation with respect to a favorable vote for Bill S-3. He also was a staunch supporter of free public vocational education. To both men, the deadlock was of great consequence. Senator Smith had a clear understanding of how the NSPIE wanted to demonstrate to the nation the need for vocational education. They were proposing a program they felt could convince Congress only through the efforts of a national study commission.The deadlock was broken by way of a "gentlemen's agreement" in which Senator Smith agreed that if the Smith-Lever bill were adopted, he would offer a resolution to create a commission to study the unsolved problem of the Page-Wilson bill. In January 1914, The Smith-Lever Act was adopted. On the same day the Page-Wilson bill was defeated in Joint Conference Committee and the tendering of the resolution was made on the following day by Senator Smith (Senate Document No. 845, 1911-1912).

On January 20, 1914, Congress approved a joint resolution authorizing President Woodrow Wilson to appoint a commission to study national aid to vocational education. The Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education was organized on April 2, 1914. SenatorHoke Smith was elected its chairman. Other members representing Congress were Senator Carroll S. Page of Vermont, Representative Dudley M. Hughes of Georgia and Representative S. D. Fess of Ohio. Several delegates were members of the NSPIE including Charles Prosser, its Executive

Secretary. Other delegates represented agriculture, education, industry and labor. The resolution provided that nine members of the Commission report to Congress no later than June 1, 1914. Five of the nine delegates were members of the NSPIE, including Charles Prosser. The Commission produced a 500-page report in less than the time allotted. It covered every phase of the many problems involved in a comprehensive study of national aid to the states for the new education. It presented its findings to Congress with recommendations for a federally aided system of vocational education based on state aid and cooperation. It outlined many of the principles and arrangements, which gave both Congress and the public an understanding of the obligations to provide vocational training as a joint responsibility of both the state and the Federal Government (Senate Report No. 97, 1915-1916).

In stressing the size of the problem, the Commission also stated figures from the 1910 Census Report, which showed that there were over 12,000,000 persons in the United States, both male and female, engaged in agriculture. Also, there were over 14,000,000 engaged in manufacturing, mechanical pursuits, and allied industries. It was probable, stated the report, that less than 1% of these persons had adequate preparation (House Report No. 181, 1916). The Commission also reported that there were social and educational needs for vocational education. Apart from its report to Congress on its findings, the Commission also presented a proposal for legislation including a draft of a bill for vocational education (Barlow, 1976).

The persons charged with the formal responsibility for finally putting the proposed bill through the legislative process were Senator Hoke Smith and Congressman Dudley M. Hughes. They copied verbatim the Commission's bill providing federal aid and introduced it, with some necessary changes, to the representative committees as the Smith-Hughes Bill (Swanson, 1962). The contribution of the NSPIE was a dominant factor in this development.

After the Bill passed the House and Senate, it was pigeonholed for a couple of years. It appeared that there was no urgency for the legislation. However, according to Hawkins, Prosser and Wright (1951), there were three reasons: the long illness of Congressman Hughes, Chairman of the House Committee on Education; the working out of details and agreements with the NSPIE legislative committee; and, finally, a delay in reaching agreement between the two Houses of Congress.

There were many favorable testimonies on behalf of the Bill by leading groups. President Wilson even made two speeches and sent messages to Congress on its behalf (Congressional Record Vol. LIV, 1916-1917). While in 1915 there still seemed no urgency to pass the Bill, in late 1916 and early 1917, the issue of the Europeans being ahead surfaced again. Frequent discussions were heard about the need to catch up, especially with the Germans, in a war preparedness effort. In this setting, the Smith-Hughes Act was signed by President Wilson on February 23, 1917. The Act outlined the training necessary to prepare for the nation's defense. The guidelines in the legislation allowed for 14-year old students attending secondary school, older persons not attending secondary school, and even persons already in the work force to receive training (Congressional Record Vol. LIV, 1916-1917).

Indeed, World War I was threatening the nation and the world. It seemed feasible to suggest that there was a providentially inspired effort by the pioneers to complete this legislation for signature by 1917. The NSPIE was the leading group to advance the concept of vocational education and successfully lobby the Federal Government to agree to fund vocational education in the public secondary schools of the nation. The efforts of the pioneers, which began as the 19th century drew to its close, reached its zenith in 1917 at a very decisive time in the nation's history.

Conclusion

As the 19th century drew to its close, the nation, indeed, found itself in a crisis affected by several factors, including that of inadequate training and preparation for an industrial changing society. It was the experience of the Depression of the1890s, which produced men of vision with a new approach for the changing scene. It is this writer's belief that it was their effort that set the nation on course in developing a new dimension for education and training.

Such organizations as the AFL and the NAM, headed by their leaders, contributed greatly to the development that brought an additional dimension to American education. The conclusion of this paper, however, is that the leaders of the NSPIE, with special reference to Charles Prosser, were mainly responsible for the development which brought the Federal Government into an alliance with the states to offer free public vocational education. The writer encourages those who are knowledgeable of the efforts of the pioneers who gave this nation the Smith-Hughes Act, known by many as the Magna Carta of vocational education, to pay tribute to these visionaries as significant contributors in the improvement of the nation's culture. They have, indeed, set the stage to be honored as prime movers of the technical advancement that will follow in the new millennium.

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