

For the H School principals and Teachers
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Is Vocational Training Practical in the Case of the
Average North Carolina High School Student?

by Robert H. Wright

This topic has been assigned to me and I am glad of an opportunity to discuss it before this association. My first impulse is to fall into the usual custom of talking in generalities that sound well and leave the impression that "He is a profound thinker upon educational topics." That is the method usually adopted at these gatherings. And the audience goes away well pleased. These effervescences from the inner conscience of the speaker when attuned to the popular prattle leave one with a feeling that accompanies listening to operatic music. We are well pleased and go away happy but nothing has stuck that will cause us to go home and do something for the boys and girls who daily look to us for that preparation that will better enable them to cope with the stern realities of everyday life when they find themselves face to face with the routine of the active problems that are to confront them in manhood and womanhood. So I have decided not to play upon the Lyre of Psychological Pedagogy for you to-day, but to talk to you in a plain practical way about a very present problem before the high school teachers of our State.

As one looks at the great problems of human life and sees back of each life and all lives a Divine purpose for each and for all; as one contemplates the responsibilities that rest upon each generation of adults for each succeeding generation of children; and as one realizes that school days are adjustment days for each for his life work, then it must dawn upon him that school life is the critical period in each life, and that the future structure of human society and for the individual must rest upon the foundation here laid.

God has a work for each person to perform. There is some one thing each is best fitted to do. If all human beings were well prepared

for the things they can best do and each was doing the thing he was best prepared to do there would be no over-crowding of any profession or industry- of any human occupation-, and there would be no lack of workers in any profession or industry, in any human occupation. The sum total of human fitness would exactly balance the sum total of human demands for human activities. There is no waste in nature.

Education, therefore, has two things to do for every youth. First, it should be the instrument that will help him find the thing in life he is best fitted by natural endowment to become, Second, it should give him that training that is necessary to help him become the best possible (whatever nature has indowed him to become- doctor, lawyer, farmer, merchant, etc.,) for him to become in the environment he is to live.

To do these two things we need at least two types of schools,- the one to help the individual find himself; the other to help him get ready to do in the best way possible that thing, whatever it is. This means, we need the general school and the vocational school.

As a rule it takes a boy or a girl until he is through the high school to determine the thing he is best fitted to do in life. This is true because it is during this adolescent age that youth comes into manhood or womanhood. Accompanying this psycho-physical change comes the real man or woman. It is during this period that we are feeling out for life's problems and attempting to adjust our lives to life's social and industrial conditions. At this age young life is trying life and tasting its opportunities. It is now that many a prodigal son comes to himself and sees himself in his right relationship to his industrial pursuit, it may be feeding swine, and also sees himself in his relation to his family obligations. It is no uncommon thing for

youth at this age to cease to feed swine and return home and take his proper place in human society. The high school should and in some way must become the guiding hand that will keep our youths from spending their substance (the best years of their young lives) in riotous living. Many a life is ruined here in the high school and some, even though they go through college, do not recover.

"A well known Christian Worker says that, there are some 1,200 college bred men of this country in the slums, prisons, jails, and sanitariums who are down and out through fast living. It is a sad fact, as he graphically states, that the noted bread line of New York City is constantly having college-bred men in it. All of this is a sad but true comment upon the fact that more men fall in life through weakness of conscience than through weakness of intellect." (Biblical Recorder September 24, 1913.) The cause for these failures is not weakness of conscience, but lack of proper adjustment. These men have never found themselves. The high schools and colleges are more to blame for the human failures than the churches.

There are in North Carolina, as will appear in the State Inspector of High Schools' next report, 200 high schools, 211 rural, and 69 city.

Of these, 101 have four year courses	59 rural and 42 city
74 " three " " "	51 " " 23 "
105 " two " " "	101 " " 4 "

There are 84 high schools, 23 city and 51 rural, offering vocational training as follows:

Business courses, city 4, rural 2

Agriculture, city 9, rural 49

Domestic Science, city 10, rural 3. (The latter are

included in the 49 offering Agriculture.)

There are 7 Farm Life Schools. (These are real vocational high schools). There are only 13 high schools offering Domestic Science courses, i.e., vocational training for the girl who wishes to become a home builder. Out of the 280 high schools there are but 7 really vocational schools and only 84 offering any form of vocational training.

In the Report of 1911-12 there were 269 high schools. In these high schools there were 14,401 students enrolled, 7,391 rural and 7,010 city. Of these 818 are "Four-year students," 232 rural and 586 city.

2,222 are "Third-year students," 910 rural, and 1,312 city

4,079 are "Second-year students", 2,098 rural, and 1,981 city

7,282 are "First-year students", 4,151 rural, and 3,131 city.

Of this enrollment of 14,946 only 585 are reported as taking vocational subjects (Music, Business Methods, Domestic Science, Education or Manual Training.) 359 of these are in rural schools and 226 in city schools.

Only a small percent. of these students will go beyond the high schools. The great majority of them, therefore, will begin the serious task of making a living without any especial preparation, and worse still, without any school experience that will help them select their life work with intelligence. They must select a life work by chance. When we start each generation into life's in this way is it any wonder that so many "fail to make good in life?" Most of life's failures are due to the fact that in youth he undertook something as a life work that nature had not endowed him for. Thus, for ignorance's sake, he buried his talent in the earth, while he became a misfit in the industrial world. There are more misfits than miscreants in human society. In youth he failed to find himself, in manhood he is an industrial failure. The high schools can not prevent all of these errors in the selection of life work. But they should at least give each youth an opportunity to find himself.

This can be done through what I am going to call "Manual Training courses" or the "A. B. C's of Vocational courses." Let each student do some work in these courses, just enough to see if he has a natural talent for mechanics, engineering, agriculture, horticulture etc. The school should no more attempt to turn out master mechanics, expert engineers, or licensed electricians than it should attempt to turn out doctors or dentists. But it should prevent- in its original meaning- ruining a good farmer to make a useless lawyer.

This work should be done in every four year high school in North Carolina, state and city. Then as fast as public sentiment will permit there should be established one or more Farm Life schools in each county. I take this type of school, because public education should first meet the demand of the greatest number possible and eighty-five percent. of our people live on or from the farms. In these Farm Life schools should be sent the boys and girls who show fitness, talent if you please, for agricultural pursuits. It is just as important to train the girls for life on a farm as it is to train the boys. This school should be a real vocational school. I do not object to having a classical course attached to the school. This school should turn out good farmers and should become a real preparatory school to our Agricultural and Mechanical College.

Our larger cities should have vocational high schools for the boys and girls who are to follow pursuits to be found in the cities, such as book-keeping, stenography, elementary courses in electricity and the mechanical arts. But these schools, too, can not come faster than public sentiment calls for them.

The high schools of America must become the peoples' colleges in America. They must cease being the middle schools and must become in spirit what they are in reality, the finishing school for the mass of the American youth. This means we must shift our interest from college

entrance requirements to the requirements of the individual high school student. I would not abolish the high school as a college preparatory institution. If the student in the high school wants to go to college it is the business of the high school to prepare him for college, but if he must go from the high school to the pursuits of life, the high school should prepare him for those pursuits.

To summarize will say, some vocational training is necessary to enable our boys and girls to find their natural talents. This can best be done through the type of Manual Training I have described. This training must precede real vocational training.

Vocational training is not possible until our people see more clearly its value. It can be established as fast as public sentiment will permit. Education must keep in touch with the spirit of the times, with the ideas and ideals of our communities. It is as hurtful to attempt things too far in advance as it is to devote your time to discarded ideals. In places in North Carolina vocational training is practical. In most communities the teachers must advocate it and demonstrate its value, thus educating our people to its necessity before we attempt to institute it.

The work of the high school is not confined to the students in the school.

I would not abolish the high school as a college preparatory institution, but I would make it an institution with its interest centered upon the specific needs of the high school students in actual attendance. In other words the high school, and all other schools are for the time being working to promote the best interests of the students in attendance. If the school can not do that it should either tell the student where to go to get the training he needs, or the school should change its course and give the student what he needs.