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POLARIZATION IN VOCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

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"Let's get it all together." A recurrent theme is developing around this phrase in contemporary America. The connotation of "getting it together" is a demand for the fusion of polarized opinions and attitudes in order to develop approaches appropriate to society's problems. Our society seems to be overwhelmed with diversity of opinion and attitude.

Vocational education and guidance are no exceptions. Polarization exists at their very heart -- the concept of work. This philosophic polarization in vocational education, vocational guidance, and the concept of work must be neutralized. In addition, fusion of attitudes in these areas must be attained if the vocational needs of American society and the individuals composing it are to be fulfilled. In short, we've got to "get it all together."

At this point in time, the majority of our society is faced with an almost infinite array of work possibilities, yet believes that satisfaction of its needs and wants lies outside the world of work. The belief is retained that public education can provide individuals with the competencies needed to enter and advance in an occupation. Yet, that educational system provides preparation in only an infinitesimal portion of the array of possibilities. Guidance programs, either through design or accident, have often found themselves manned by individuals having little experience outside the academic realm, and catering almost exclusively to a minority of students who actually intend to enter a college or university in preparation for a profession.

Societal attitudes appear to be the major contributing factor in the polarization of vocational education, vocational guidance, and the concept of work. These attitudes have tended to fluctuate over the years, eventually developing to their current state and consequently affecting the three areas mentioned in such a manner as to drive them into the contemporary polarized condition. To better understand this polarization, it might be well at this point to consider the development of attitude in the three areas.

Since a concept of work is fundamental to either vocational education or vocational guidance, possibly it deserves first consideration. Man's concept of work has moved from one extreme to the other throughout history. Interpretations of Biblical writings indicate that man viewed work as evil or as punishment for his sinful nature. This attitude continued for centuries, being modified only in that those close to God were deserving of freedom from physical labor. Both rulers and the clergy were believed to be selected by God and, as such, "above" the travail of common man. Only when man (the clergy in particular) began to drift away from an absolutely idealistic philosophy toward realism did work begin to lose a degree of its evil connotation. Even then, work was of a positive nature only when it was in the service of God. (This attitude still exists to some degree today.)

Perhaps the greatest change in the concept of work occurred during the settlement of the United States. Under

the primitive and adverse conditions existing in that period, man found that survival was dependent on individual and collective ability to work. Consequently, work became viewed as a positive value. The kind of work involved had little to do with its value. The gunsmith was as important to survival as was the physician. Individual independence in a vocation was the order of the day. Often the individual's labor involved every step from raw material to finished product. As a result, he could take pride both in his work and in his personal contribution to society, for both the work and the contribution were highly visible.

The industrial revolution, however, brought an end to this visibility for both the craftsman and the laborer. Their work became specialized, or even fragmented. Only the entrepreneur had control of the "big picture." The demands of survival became less pressing, and the time arrived when the kind of work a man performed determined the value of that work and of the man himself.

The working man was no longer independent, and was under supervision and pressure to produce more and more, as efficiently as possible. Personal satisfaction and self-esteem could no longer be derived from the vast majority of occupations, in and of themselves. Rather, occupations became a means of achieving pleasure through other ends. Here is the point where we find ourselves today in regard to the concept of work.

Vocational education is based primarily on the concept of work and had its beginnings in the family. In early times father provided son with the skills necessary to carry on the family occupation. In time, this practice developed into the slightly more formalized apprenticeship method of gaining occupational skills. For the most part, such training was manually oriented and was usually undertaken by the lower classes.

Following the industrial revolution, society for the first time assumed the primary responsibility for vocational education, as we know it today, and assigned it to the public schools. Prior to that time, formal education was essentially for the upper classes and of a general nat-

ure. It was believed that such an education provided the facilities needed for coping with the requirements of business and social leadership. (This attitude is still prevalent today, as evidenced by many of the programs in our public schools, colleges, and universities.) Therefore, only the lower classes who would perform skilled and semi-skilled labor needed "vocational education." In addition, the technological advances of that time were so limited as to require program development by the schools in only a few vocational areas. Only within the past decade has any appreciable broadening of vocational education in the public schools been realized. In the interim, industry has assumed much of the responsibility for vocational preparation.

Guidance programs, in all probability, derived their beginnings from the vocational programs of Frank Parsons. However, the rising influence of psychological therapy caused the vocational aspect of guidance to be pushed into the background. Guidance counselors found themselves concerned more and more with psycho-social adjustment and the task of placing high school graduates into the "right" college or university. The trend away from guidance for the vocationally directed student toward guidance for the college-bound has continued until the present day. It is only within recent years that a serious, concerted effort has been made to prepare counselors solely for the function of vocational guidance.

If current societal attitudes and values are basic to the polarization in vocational education and guidance it is within those same attitudes that change must originate. Both an intensive and broad effort are necessary if change and the resulting fusion of the concept of work, vocational education, and vocational guidance is to take place.

A program of occupational appreciation needs to be developed for the beginning years of public education. A start has already been made, but there is still room for improvement. Appreciation can be gained first through the relating of subject matter to the various areas of the world of work and secondly, by inculcating a greater understanding and appreciation on the part of teachers for all levels or types of work. Teachers and society in general must

accept the fact that all students cannot become leaders of industry and society. In addition, they must be willing to accept education as a learning process, not a "weeding out" process.

The program of occupational appreciation should gradually phase into one of occupational exploration. Such a program should permit a student to explore, individually, those vocations that he has considered heretofore in his world of fantasy.

The student should next move into a program of vocational experience, or in-depth exploration. This experience or exploration should follow tentative vocational choices resulting from earlier general exploration and vocational guidance which has provided a valid assessment of interests and abilities. At the end of this program, the student should be ready to prepare for a "job cluster," or possibly a specific occupation.

Actual preparation or extended experience in specific occupations should begin at the point when most students are completing high school. This program should provide a flexible transition, however, allowing for both early and late vocational choice. This particular phase of vocational training should be conducted at the community or junior college level. Training at that point should remain pre-occupational in nature, i. e., skill development which would be applicable in a variety of specific job classifications. In order to provide the wide variety of experiences needed throughout the world of work, a state or national plan should be developed under which various institutions would provide specialized programs, avoiding duplication in so far as possible.

Once broad proficiency is gained, the student should look to industry for final job preparation in a specific occupation. In many instances, industry has already developed highly effective and efficient educational programs. Individuals wishing to pursue professional careers might follow the pattern outlined or the more traditional pattern of a university education.

Concurrent with such a series of programs, continuing vocational and avocational guidance would be essential. Guidance of this type would require the development of a tremendous amount of supportive material including, but most certainly not restricted to, a broad array of interest and aptitude measurement instruments. It is through such a guidance program that concepts of the relationship of vocational and avocational needs can be determined and met.

In addition to a revision of vocational attitude and approach in the public schools, a means for changing adult vocational attitudes is needed. The mass media can provide such a means. The media are currently being used to mold attitude on such social problems as race relations, drug abuse, smoking, and mental health. The door has already been opened in the area of vocational appreciation, if one considers certain popular television program formats. If radio, television, newspapers, and magazines can create a national awareness of "environmental crisis," could they not also create an awareness of vocational needs?

The changes recommended would be rather drastic, time consuming, and difficult to implement. Even so, until vocational education takes into consideration the total reality of the world of work and the pattern of child development in vocational selection, it will serve only a few, and these rather impotently. Until vocational guidance can provide the insights and information needed for intelligent occupational and avocational selection, it will fall short of its intended function. Equally, avocation must become accepted as an integral part of the concept of work. Until individual value is attributed to one's total life style, vocational guidance and education can accomplish little toward fulfillment of individual and societal needs. At the time when the three, the concept of work, vocational education, and vocational guidance, become focused on those needs, then and only then, will fusion take place and will we really be ready to "get it all together."

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