

200 Years of Vocational Education 1776-1976

To condense the fabulous history and background of vocational education into one issue of the AV Journal is an almost impossible task. There is so much to say, so much to describe, so many threads to make visible and so many relationships to make clear that broad jumps in time must be made with only a sentence or two of explanation.

The history of vocational education, at least during the first 100 years of our national history, existed separately from the history of education in general. Of course, a few persons, Franklin for example, had cited the need for a practical component of education, but most of these ideas became lost in the great battle for literacy. Also, the educational needs of mechanics and farmers were solved in their own way and little, if any, thought was given to formal practical instruction as an imperative during the early years. The fact remains that in order to thoroughly understand the history of vocational education, one must review the history of education in general. Hence the emphasis upon the general development of education during the first part of this report.

During the early part of this report I have quoted generously from my historian colleague, Professor Sol Cohen, editor of the five-volume *Education in the United States: A Documentary History of Education*, published by Random House, New York, in 1974. Cohen's publication is a must for anyone in the field of educational history. His succinct summaries of trends and events are themselves a masterful match for the classics cited. I have referred to

Cohen's work merely by quotation marks followed by his name in parenthesis. Similarly, I have quoted generously from my own *History of Industrial Education in the United States*, published in 1967 by the Chas. A. Bennett Company, Peoria, Illinois. Other publications from which I have borrowed are cited in the text.

I have chosen to divide the 200 years into four periods of 50 years each. The first 50 years, 1776-1826, I view as an awakening to the need for education. This was a period in which we embarked upon the great American experiment of attempting to educate all of our people.

The second period of 50 years, 1826-1876, shows much independent action by individuals and groups as they sought to react to the needs of the industrial revolution in America. Also the first feeble beginnings of some organized attempts at vocational education appear here. Perhaps one of the more important parts of this period is represented by the conviction which developed in America about the need to provide a general education for all. This is exemplified by the Kalamazoo Case which ultimately opened high schools to vocational education.

During the third 50 years the vocational education age emerges and vocational education as we know it today had its beginning. This particular part of the historical period remains largely untouched and deserves penetrating review by vocational education historians, for our educational heritage is to be found in these years.

The fourth period, 1926-76, "Coming of Age," is marked by the great growth and development of vocational education in the United

States. Vocational education emerges as an educational program great in size, of high quality, related to a fundamental objective of American life—how one earns his living. More than twice as many people are enrolled in vocational education programs as are enrolled in all of the four-year colleges and universities in the nation. In its "coming of age," vocational education reaches out to many more people, the handicapped, the disadvantaged, to the particular needs of ethnic groups, and to the vocational training needs of women. On the occupational side, the expansion is directed to embrace more and more occupations, with attention to a variety of clusters of occupations.

I have only two regrets concerning this issue of the Journal. First, that it was an impossible task to decide what would most likely be of interest to 55,000 AVA members, and second, that each element could not have been developed more fully. The history of vocational education is an exciting study. Hopefully, this issue of the Journal not only will provide some basic information for AVA members, but also inspire others to probe the story of vocational education—principally its fundamental issues.

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