

THE PROBLEM OF VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

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PREFACE

This book has been written from the point of view that vocational guidance is an educational service which should be considered an essential and integral part of a program of public education. At the same time it is recognized throughout the discussion that guidance involves a number of specialized activities each of which calls for a technique of its own. Most of the book is devoted to a consideration of these activities, their place in a city school system, and the organization which makes possible their most effective functioning. Attention is given also to intelligence and other standardized tests in relation to guidance, and to vocational guidance in rural schools and in colleges. Most of the material here presented has been used by the author in his classes.

Some readers may wonder why educational guidance is not given consideration, and may raise the question whether much that is discussed is not after all educational rather than vocational guidance. As conceived by the writer, vocational guidance includes most of that which is usually connoted by the term educational guidance. The latter has its foundations in abilities, aptitudes, interests, and limitations which are significant in relation to vocational choice, and deals with helping the individual to plan an educational program which must be related quite definitely to this choice.

It has seemed wise, therefore, not to give special consideration to educational guidance but to assume that it will receive adequate attention in a comprehensive program of vocational guidance.

Since the effort which is made in these pages is to present in comparatively brief and concise form the problem of vocational guidance as a whole, the treatment of the subject is such as should make the book interesting and valuable to superintendents of schools, school principals, junior and senior high school teachers, social workers, and parents, as well as to those who are more directly engaged in guidance activities.

The author wishes gratefully to acknowledge his indebtedness to several of his colleagues for helpful criticisms and suggestions and to numerous publishers and authors for the privilege of quoting, in a few cases at some length, from their publications.

GEORGE E. MYERS

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN,
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. PRESENT METHODS OF ENTERING OCCUPATIONS	1
II. WASTE INVOLVED IN PRESENT METHODS OF ENTERING OCCUPATIONS	23
III. SOCIETY'S RESPONSIBILITY IN THE TRANSFER FROM SCHOOL TO OCCUPATION	39
IV. THE CONTRIBUTION OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION TO VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE	47
V. VOCATIONAL INFORMATION COURSES	62
VI. OCCUPATIONAL TRY-OUT OR EXPLORATORY EXPERI- ENCES IN THE JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL PERIOD	83
VII. INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING IN JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	128
VIII. VOCATIONAL PREPARATION IN A CITY GUIDANCE PROGRAM	144
IX. PLACEMENT	165
X. ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF A COMPRE- HENSIVE PROGRAM OF VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE IN A CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM	186
XI. STANDARDIZED TESTS IN A VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE PROGRAM	209
XII. VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES	262
XIII. VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE IN COLLEGES AND UNIVER- SITIES	280

THE PROBLEM OF VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

CHAPTER I

PRESENT METHODS OF ENTERING OCCUPATIONS

The annual transfer from school to occupations. Nearly 1,000,000 boys and young men and approximately 500,000 girls and young women in the United States each year face the problems involved in entering wage-earning occupations. For them school days are over. The business of earning a living confronts them. Responsibility for "pulling their own weight" and making, if possible, some slight additional contribution to society rests upon them. They *must* find places for themselves somewhere, somehow, in the busy, whirling mechanism of the world's work. There are important facts to be recognized concerning this annual army of recruits and concerning the occupations awaiting them, and it is our purpose here to point out these facts.

Age differences among those who transfer. These recruits range in age from ten years to twenty-five years and beyond. Approximately two thirds of them are under eighteen years of age. It should be kept in mind, however, that the number beginning employment under eighteen years has been decreasing for some time and will probably continue to decrease.

The latest data available on the number of young workers of different ages are given in the following table:

NUMBER AT DIFFERENT AGES ENGAGED IN WAGE-EARNING OCCUPATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES ¹

AGE	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
10 to 13	258,259	119,804	378,063
14 and 15	455,989	226,806	682,795
16	501,134	277,823	778,957
17	602,322	331,369	933,691
18 and 19	1,443,968	802,236	2,246,204
20 to 24	4,121,390	1,909,075	6,030,465

Burdge ² found in 1918 that 85.6 per cent of all boys 16, 17, and 18 years of age in New York State were out of school. This was during the last year of the World War when the demand for young workers was unusually strong.

Differences in preparation. These young people enter wage-earning careers with a great variety of educational preparation, ranging all the way from complete illiteracy to the finest kind of professional training, though two thirds do not go beyond the eighth grade. The United States census for 1920 shows that almost 6 per cent of the population ten years of age and over was then illiterate. According to the same authority, between 3 per cent and 3.5 per cent was engaged in the practice of the professions. It should be noted, however, that not all those practicing the

¹ United States Census, 1920.

² Burdge, Howard G. — *Our Boys*, p. 33.

professions, or even all those now entering the professions each year, have obtained a high-grade professional education.

The following table presents the situation as it existed a few years ago as far as the great mass of those leaving school for employment is concerned. The proportion remaining in the high school grades and in the college years has increased considerably since the investigation, upon which this table is based, was made, but no comprehensive data of more recent date are available.

TABLE ¹ SHOWING THE NUMBER OF PUPILS OUT OF EACH "1000 ENTERING THE FIRST FIVE ELEMENTARY GRADES" WHO SURVIVED IN LATER GRADES.

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Number of Survivors</i>
Sixth	834
Seventh	710
Eighth	642
First year high school	342
Second year high school	246
Third year high school	181
Fourth year high school	150
Graduates	139

Of the one hundred thirty-nine who graduated from high school, seventy-two entered college (not including normal schools and teachers' colleges); fifty-two reached the second year; thirty-nine, the third year; thirty, the fourth year; and twenty-three finally graduated from college.

Differences in general intelligence. It has been established by mental-alertness tests that these young people enter employment with varied endowments of

¹ U. S. Bureau of Education investigation, 1918.

general intelligence. Man has long recognized the imbecile on the one hand and the exceptionally capable on the other, but only in the last two decades have serious efforts been made to chart the levels of intelligence between these two extremes. According to the well-known results of the army intelligence tests given to 1,700,000 men in service during the World War, approximately 4.5 per cent were found to possess very superior intelligence; 9 per cent, superior intelligence; 16.5 per cent, high average intelligence; 25 per cent, average intelligence; 20 per cent, low average intelligence; 15 per cent, inferior intelligence; and 10 per cent, very inferior intelligence. Even if, as some have claimed, the army draft did not give a fair cross section of American life, here is striking and significant evidence of marked differences in intelligence among those who transfer from school to employment.

Differences in special aptitudes and interests. These young people entering the world's work each year differ enormously in special aptitudes and interests. While scientific investigation in the field of special aptitudes is still in its infancy, practical experience long ago made it clear that differences of this character exist. Artistic, musical, literary, military, and other geniuses of the past are good illustrations of the possession of special aptitudes to a marked degree, coupled with exceptional opportunity for their development. Modern business and industry, aided by the contribution of modern psychology, are making it increasingly clear that the possession of special aptitudes is not limited to geniuses but is widely distributed and applies to an immense number of the more prosaic occupa-

tions as well as to the artistic and unusual. This subject will be considered at greater length in a later chapter.

Differences in temperament and emotional stability. Moreover, there are important differences among these young recruits to the world's work in temperament and emotional stability. One is quiet, reserved, a poor "mixer"; another is talkative, effusive, makes acquaintances easily. One likes to be alone and to work with things; another prefers to be in a crowd and to work with people. One is stolid, phlegmatic, impervious to nervous shock; another is high-strung, quick to react to the slightest stimulus, excitable. Others range all the way between these extremes and combine temperamental and emotional qualities in various ways.

Physical differences. Again, there are great natural differences in physique, in strength, in endurance, in susceptibility to disease; for example, to tuberculosis. Some start life's work with weak hearts. And some are obliged to begin their wage-earning careers with such definite physical handicaps as partial or total deafness or blindness, or a crippled condition resulting from infantile paralysis, or accident or other cause.

Differences in personality and character traits. Finally, these young recruits to the world's work face wage-earning with important differences in personality and character traits not included under any of the above headings. Due to heredity or early environment or both, some are energetic, others are lazy; some are highly ambitious, others are comparatively indifferent to future advancement; some are persistent

and determined to carry through whatever is undertaken, others are changeable and easily discouraged; some are courageous and daring, others timid and afraid in the presence of the unusual; some possess a high degree of initiative and leadership, others prefer routine activities and following those who take the lead; some are trustworthy and dependable, others are dishonest and unreliable.

Corresponding differences in occupations. On the other hand there is a great variety of occupations calling each year for a veritable army of new workers and ready to absorb all or nearly all who are available. The number of different occupations in the United States is usually placed by writers at 2000 to 3000. This number is constantly changing, and it is impossible to fix it definitely at any time because there is no agreement as to how one man's work must differ from another's in order to be called a distinct occupation. Payne¹ states that there are 17,000 occupations in New York City, but does not indicate how he arrived at this number.

While these many occupations divide themselves naturally into groups as far as the qualifications required for success are concerned, each group calling for more or less similar qualifications, there are enormous differences in the requirements of occupations in different groups. Some call for youth; others demand a fair degree of maturity. Some require extensive education; others may be carried on successfully by illiterates. Some demand a high degree of intelligence;

¹ Payne, A. F. — "The Problem of the Try-Out Courses," *Industrial Arts Magazine*, May, 1925.

others are open to morons. Some call for special aptitudes of one kind ; others for special aptitudes of a very different kind. Some require physical strength and endurance ; others quickness and dexterity. Some are impossible to the stolid and phlegmatic ; others are equally impossible to the high-strung and excitable. Some demand initiative and leadership ; others require ability to do the same thing over and over again, day after day and week after week.

The transfer from school to employment not a single act but a process. How do these boys and girls and young men and women of such varied characteristics and qualifications find their way from school and college into the places they are to fill in this maze of occupations, with their widely differing demands and requirements?

In attempting to answer this question, it must be kept in mind that educational institutions, especially in the larger cities, are giving this problem more attention each year and that, as a result, methods of entering occupations are gradually changing in important respects. Then too, for most people, entering an occupation is not a single act which is completed the day after leaving school. It is, rather, a process beginning before school days are ended and extending over a considerable period after employment begins. For most people, it includes a consideration of what they would like to do, finding a first job, and then shifting from one job to another until somehow one of the jobs becomes a permanent occupation. The amount of shifting varies with different individuals from none at all to a great deal. In getting at present methods of entering occu-

pations we are, therefore, interested in knowing something about the information at hand when the choice of work is under consideration before school days are over; something about the first jobs and the influences determining their selection; something about the shifting and the reasons for it; and something about the forces at work which result in one of the jobs finally becoming the permanent occupation.

Let us consider first that large group of young workers composed of those who leave school before they pass beyond seventeen years of age. It has already been seen that by this time about two thirds are engaged in wage-earning employment. The great majority of these have no more than an eighth grade education. Indeed a large percentage have not gone beyond the sixth grade.

Character of information upon which choices of occupations are based. What do these boys and girls know about the opportunities and requirements of occupations? Those who live in the country know by experience and by observation quite intimately about the particular kind of farming carried on on the home farm. This may be general farming, or it may be dairying or fruit raising or any one of a dozen other kinds of specialized farming. The work may be done in a businesslike manner according to the principles of scientific agriculture, or it may be conducted in a slipshod manner according to methods inherited from the previous generation. The farm may be well equipped with modern labor-saving machinery the operation of which requires considerable mechanical ability, or it may be poorly equipped and call for less

mechanical ability and more hard physical labor. In addition, the farm boy and girl have a less intimate knowledge of other types of farming carried on in their community, unless, perchance, the entire community be engaged in the same kind of agricultural activity. Moreover, the average country boy has picked up, by reading and by visits to the neighboring town or city, bits of information or misinformation concerning a few occupations that are carried on in the cities. The information about occupations that comes to the country home has increased very much since the coming of rural mail delivery, the automobile, and the radio. It will continue to increase in quantity. Whether it improves in quality and in value as a means of aiding in choice of occupations will depend upon whether a systematic effort is made to this end by some agency interested in vocational guidance. In general, such information as comes now is likely to cast a glamour around city occupations as compared with those of the country.

Boys and girls who live in villages and small towns, as a rule, have less valuable information concerning any one occupation than is acquired by the average country youth concerning farming. However, they do pick up, usually, somewhat more complete and reliable information than the country youth concerning several small-town occupations because of more frequent contacts with them. On the other hand, most small-town youth have extremely meager knowledge of occupations in the large cities unless the same occupations are represented in the towns in which they live.

In larger cities the daily contacts of life afford boys and girls, while still in school, opportunities to pick up bits of information concerning a considerable number of occupations. Summer employment and after-school employment add more detailed knowledge concerning a very limited number of occupations in the case of many pupils. Some school systems, in recent years, have undertaken to provide pupils with occupational information with the definite purpose of aiding them in deciding what to do when they leave school. But even in the larger cities the great majority of those who enter employment before reaching the age of seventeen are still obliged to do so with pitifully meager information concerning the possibilities and demands of the occupations which are open to them.

Nor do these youth who face employment for the first time, whether they live in the country, in the village, or in the city, possess any more adequate information concerning their own abilities, special aptitudes, temperaments, and personality traits.

Obtaining the first job. When the question of actually beginning employment faces these youths, most of them find their first jobs, and often subsequent jobs, by going from place to place where they think young help is needed and making personal application. They learn of these places through friends, through newspaper advertisements, through cards displayed in windows, and in other ways. In most cities certain firms are known as employers of young workers in considerable numbers, and boys and girls naturally drift to these places when seeking employment. As yet, schools and other social agencies of the community

play a very minor part in this matter of vital importance to youth and to society as a whole. The following table from Burdge's ¹ study of the 245,000 sixteen-, seventeen-, and eighteen-year-old employed boys of New York State shows how this large group obtained employment:

How 245,000 Boys Obtained Employment

GROUPS	FRIEND	ADVERTISEMENT	SCHOOL	CHURCH	EMP. BUR.	APPLIED
Greater New York	27.9%	5.7%	1.8%	0.2%	1.7%	62.7%
Cities over 25,000	22.6%	0.2%	0.7%	0.1%	0.3%	76.1%
Cities under 25,000	24.9%	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	74.2%
Villages over 5000	27.3%	0.1%	0.2%	—	0.4%	72.0%

Lewis ² in his study of 800 Iowa boys found that 85 per cent of the jobs they had had were found by the boys' "hawking" for them. He adds: "Apparently the teacher does not attempt to assist these boys in securing work. Nor are their friends, relatives, and parents of very much greater assistance. The majority of boys find work for themselves. It seems not to be considered the business of any social agency, other than the public school, accurately to inform such boys concerning the occupations open to them. No literature is handed them concerning desirable vocations, and apparently no advice is offered them regarding unskilled, semi-skilled, or highly skilled employments. They are not told about the 'blind-alley' jobs. No

¹ Burdge, Howard G. — *Our Boys*, p. 194.

² Lewis, E. E. — "Work, Wages and Schooling of 800 Iowa Boys," Bloomfield's *Readings in Vocational Guidance*, p. 242.

one looks after them systematically, following them from the door of the schoolroom into the jobs which necessity or choice causes them to accept. They find their own jobs and take the jobs that they can find quickly."

Mrs. Reed,¹ speaking from extensive experience in the field of junior employment work, in discussing the method of securing the first position, says: "Turning to the employee side of the problem, we find that personal application, suggestions from friends, and newspaper advertising are the most helpful employment agencies. Signs in the windows rank higher as an efficiently functioning employment service for boys and girls than does the assistance of the public schools."

Because it is the first thing available is, according to several authorities, the most common reason for the choice by these younger workers of their first job. Other writers place wages to be received as the dominating influence, in the case of both the first and early succeeding jobs. A great deal depends upon business conditions as to which influence is the stronger. If times are bad and it is difficult to obtain employment at all, the first job available is likely to be grabbed. If times are good and employment plentiful, the wage influence tends to become dominant. Also, wages are more likely to influence the choice of later jobs than of the first one. Sometimes opportunity to learn a trade or chance for advancement is the deciding influence, but not often. Occasionally nearness to home, clean work, easy work, short hours, or the fact that "a young friend works there" determines the choice, though

¹ Reed, Anna Y. — *Junior Wage Earners*, p. 27.