

The General High School Curriculum

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(Third Installment)

Shall We Vocationalize the General Secondary Schools?

THERE are three recent developments in education in the country which may strengthen the impression that there is considerable thinking in favor of vocationalizing the general secondary schools of the Philippines. These developments are the following:

1. The Revised Educational Program prescribed by the Board of National Education requires that at the end of the Second Year high school, students are to choose either the college preparatory course or any of the vocational education courses. The vocational education courses definitely prepare the students for entrance into vocational occupations.

2. A pending bill in the Congress of the Philippines is to set up a separate Bureau of Vocational Education.

3. Several general high schools have recently been converted into national vocational schools by congressional legislation.

These developments should lead to a thorough examination of the trend, with a view to determining whether or not the trend is good for our country in general and for the students themselves in particular.

As stated by the writer in a previous article published in the July 1957 issue of the *Philippine Educator*, it would be a good thing if the manpower potential now available in the public and private secondary schools of the Philippines could be trained so that they become effective participants in the economic development of the country. This statement is not incompatible with the other statement made by the writer to the effect that there is danger in training too many vocational workers for which no prospective jobs are available, considering the underdeveloped condition of our trades and industries. We must hasten to repeat that we once said (in a previous article) that for agriculture there is no doubt in our mind that we need more trained farmers, considering the fact that there are still vast tracts of agricultural lands that need the hands of the tiller of the soil. But it was stated in the article referred to that it was doubtful if effective vocational workers could be trained in the general secondary schools, considering the relative immaturity of the students (ages 15 and 16).

But let it be reiterated: students in the high school could contribute to the economic development of the country in such economically productive activities as are suitable to their state of physical maturity and in accordance with the purposes of general education. Some thirty years back, the young people in the elementary schools (they were more mature then, to be sure, but not more mature than are the students now enrolled in the general secondary schools) fabricated articles worth hundreds and thousands of pesos which found their way in the markets of the United States. These articles were mostly baskets, carved articles made of wood, and embroideries. The production of these articles does not need much vocational training; they are only practical arts activities. If these activities lead to the development of a vocation, there can be nothing wrong with that. Along with these activities, elementary school children were also engaged in food production activities. The present writer was once an intermediate school gardening teacher, and he is positive that the vegetable crops exhibited by school gardens in Provincial Garden Days were much superior to the usual run of school garden products nowadays.

In the recently introduced "Home Industries" program, it has been given out as a criticism of the program that the "schools should not be converted into factories" and that "when the school activity is intended to produce commercial (salable) articles, the educational value of the activity is lost." This kind of attitude is not understandable, especially if it is manifested by people who want to vocationalize the high schools, for it is clear that they want to make the students economically productive and yet at the same breath they are afraid that their production activities in the high schools may become too commercialized to the extent that "the educational value activities is lost."

But to go back for a moment to the vocational "trend" indicated in the first part of this article.

As a result of the Revised Educational Program promulgated by the Board of National Education, there will now be greater stress for vocational education proper in the general high schools. There can be no serious objection to having a young person prepare himself for a vocational occupation even if he

is only in the high school and is only 15 or 16 years of age, provided he has the inclination, the capacity, and the urgent need for entering an occupation as soon as possible in order to earn a living. The youngster who has a very strong desire to learn a trade or to prepare himself for an occupation will invariably succeed in attaining what he wants if he wants it very badly. We contend, however, that those who have these qualifications should be encouraged to enter vocational schools; perhaps most of them who have these qualifications are already enrolled in vocational schools. What we are opposed to is to make those who take up the vocational courses in the general high schools follow practically the same curriculum and the same kind of training as those who are actually preparing themselves for vocational occupations.

We believe, and this quite strongly, that there should be no specialization at all in general high school, that all students should be given general education, and that choice of occupation should be made at the end of the high school course, when students are mature enough to make wise choices of future occupational work. We also believe, as indicated in a previous article, that we should conduct a scientific survey of occupational needs and vocational demands in the country before we further extend the vocational education program and include even the students of the general secondary schools in the wholesale and nationwide training for vocational jobs that may not exist.

The trend toward vocationalization is further manifested by the fact that some people are trying to push a bill through Congress designed to get up a Bureau of Vocational Education, quite apart from the Bureau of Public Schools. Ostensibly the purpose of those who wish to have a separate Bureau of Vocational Education is to be allowed the freedom to handle vocational education work without interference from "academically inclined" educational authorities. It is not understood why there is such a feeling of being interfered with. The enrolment in vocational schools all over the country has increased from 11.03% (of the total high school enrolment) in 1945-46 to 19.08% in 1955-56. Some people might be wishing that percentage should be greater. That is a legitimate wish, considering the need for trained manpower necessary to develop the economic resources of the country, when and if we are set to go on full-scale industrialization of trade and agriculture. But as it is, we do not know what the new era that is dawning will need. We cannot be producing vocational workers indefinitely without knowing the vocational demands of the future. A survey of provincial trade school graduates was made sometime in 1952 to determine how well they were placed. It was found that 40% were doing the kind of work for which they were trained in the trade school, and this figure in-

cluded those who were pursuing technological courses in college and the girls who were graduated from the home economics courses and had become housewives. What happened to the remaining 60%? They were still looking for jobs, four years after completing the trade school course. There can be nothing wrong about vocational education of the right kind, the kind that is demanded by the occupational world. By all means let the vocational courses be expanded, but they should be expanded in the right direction. And the only way to find out what that direction is to conduct a scientific survey of vocational needs and demands.

The danger in a separate Bureau of Vocational Education to administer and supervise the vocational schools lies in the fact that there will be greater cleavage between general education and vocational education. There need not be any hostility between these two types of education. Many educators and educational philosophers say that vocational education should be part and parcel of general education. Perhaps this is what is objected to by vocational people that vocational education is to be considered subordinate to general education. If those who believe in general education would only get together and discuss this matter dispassionately with vocational education people there need be no cleavage, even hostility, between general education and vocational education. Each is an indispensable part of the other. Vocational education without general education would be considered a kind of very narrow specialism, and general education without vocational would be what used to be called "liberal education" intended by the early Greeks to mean the kind of education suitable for "free men" (those who were not slaves). The man who knows only carpentry or rice culture for instance and is incapable of broad outlooks and deep insights, who is not possessed of the disciplines provided by the humanities would indeed be a very narrow man. The "academic" man, on the other hand, who does not even know elementary gardening and would not be able to drive a nail straight into a piece of wood is likewise a very narrow man. These are not the ideal citizens of a democracy.

If the vocational schools should be separated from the Bureau of Public Schools it is feared that these schools would be engaged in a very narrow type of education. It would be unfortunate if it should come to a pass that the person who knows how to use a chisel or fertilize a cornfield would be the only kind that is considered a good citizen. It would likewise be unfortunate if the person who is versed in classical literature would be considered the most desirable kind of citizen. These are extreme positions, of course, and it is not likely that these positions are widely supported. But these extreme positions would become the rule rather than the exception if general education

and vocational education were to be considered separate and discrete types of education. Vocational education would become more and more vocational, and general education would become more and more general, perhaps academic, with the results that the ideal citizen — the one who knows one thing well and also knows many other things — would be lost to us as our concept of the ideal citizen. If vocational education and general education should become distinct and separate phases of education, there would be the possibility that their respective roles as the ingredients necessary to produce the “whole” man would be jeopardized. General education is leaven for vocational education, and vice versa.

The third aspect of the trend, that of the wholesale conversion of general high schools into vocational high schools, is a very serious one. Consider the following:

1. Where a general high school is converted into a vocational high school, there will be more vocational education teachers and some of the general education teachers will have to be displaced. How will they be displaced or replaced, especially if they are regular teachers? And will there be enough vocational education teachers to teach in these newly created vocational schools? Even now, many of the vocational education teachers in the general high schools are not well qualified; there is a dearth of vocational education teachers.

2. If a general high school is converted into a vocational high school, it is expected that the students who were formerly enrolled in the general high school become the students of the vocational high school. This means that, regardless of their inclinations, capacities, and interests, the students will become vocational education students. For it is doubtless true that students attend a high school nearest to their homes, often in disregard of the courses offered. The writer was once the commencement speaker in a graduation program of a rural high school. Before graduation day, he interviewed the 37 students who were enrolled in the Third Year of the same school. Three questions were asked: 1) If and when you graduate from this school, what do you intend to do? 2) If you intend to go to college, what course will you take? 3) Why did you attend this school, in the first place? These were the answers: All but two of the students would go to college; the two would go into farming

immediately. Of those who intended to go to college, only two would take up a course in agriculture. One hundred percent of the students stated that they went to that school because it was nearest their homes and that therefore it was more economical for them to do so than to go elsewhere.

When a general high school is converted into a vocational school, many young people in the area who intend to graduate from high school will enrol in that vocational high school, regardless of their future plans. All of our nations and idealisms with respect to the desirability of vocational guidance and counselling will prove to be of little value in that situation.

This wholesale conversion of general high schools into vocational high schools serves only one purpose: to shift the burden of financial support from the provincial or other local government to the national government, without any assurance that support will be more generous, unless foreign aid is made available to these schools in the form of equipment. In other words, we shall sacrifice the individual interests and needs of students for the dubious gain of lightening the financial load of local governments insofar as supporting the general high schools is concerned.

And so, we go back to one of the statements made in a previous article: there is now a large army of unemployed, almost one and one-half million, many of whom have had work experiences and therefore have vocational skills of one kind or another. If we graduate from the vocational courses, say, 5% of the total Fourth Year enrolment in public and private secondary schools, we would be adding a year about 20,000 vocationally trained (we hope they are well trained) workers to an already glutted labor market. Add to that the number graduating from the regular vocational schools, and you will have a much worsened unemployment problem in your hands.

Even at the risk of being repetitious (for this matter was already discussed in two previous articles), this writer would like to discuss further what general education is and why it is desirable that all high school students should be provided with a good general education before they make final choice as to occupational careers at the end of the high school course.

The next article in the series will be entitled “What Is General Education?”

