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ADVISING CHILDREN IN THEIR CHOICE  
OF OCCUPATION AND SUPERVISING  
THE WORKING CHILD

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## ADVISING CHILDREN IN THEIR CHOICE OF OCCUPATION AND SUPERVISING THE WORKING CHILD.

### THE NEED.

Perhaps the most important time in a child's life, and the one most fraught with danger, is when he leaves school and enters industrial life.

Each year an army of over 1,000,000 children between the ages of 14 and 16 marches out of the schools of this country to become wage earners. This does not include the children under 14 years of age, who, in a number of States, are permitted to work at that early age. During the past year the number of employed children has greatly increased because of the war. The great majority of children entering industry leave school before the seventh grade is reached; many of them can barely pass the literacy test in order to get their working papers, and others are wholly illiterate. With only a meager education in many cases and without guidance these children are thrown upon their own resources to find a job in any way they can.

The school's obligation to these boys and girls suddenly comes to an end and they are left to use or waste the education it has given them. For the children who come from better homes the school provides education and supervision up to the age of 18, or through high school; but for the children whose school days end as soon as the law allows, the school permits chance circumstance to make or mar their careers between the school-leaving age and 18.

There are a few children who are assisted to suitable openings by their parents. The parents of these children have observed their children's tastes and talents, they have discussed them with the teachers and they make it a point to know as much as they can about the opportunities in the occupations for which the children seem to be qualified. For these children the community should have little concern. A large number of parents would gladly do well by their children but their knowledge of the opportunities open to boys and girls is meager. They do not know how to find work for a child. They do not know what would be best for the child to do. Still other parents are concerned only for the immediate financial return for their child's labor. They are in very real need of what the child can earn, or they do not see the advantage of sacrificing present comfort to the child's future.

Where care and foresight and knowledge of industries are lacking on the part of the parents the children are left to their own resources and inclinations. They leave school, many of them, on the very day they reach 14 and start on their aimless search for a job, making the rounds of the factories and office buildings in their neighborhoods and answering the advertisements in the newspapers.

Notwithstanding the hit-or-miss method used in finding work, and the accompanying dangers, there are some boys and girls who turn out quite satisfactorily. Large numbers of these children, however, get into "blind-alley" jobs that demand no skill and offer little opportunity for advancement. The work they do is not educative; they are not learning anything that will be of use to them in later life. When they are too old for a child's task and a child's wage their places are filled by younger boys and girls while they, having neither skill nor ambition, drift among the casual workers or the unemployed.

Many other children find work which they do not like or for which they have no ability or aptitude. They tire of the monotony of the mechanical processes which children do, they grow restless, and so they leave. They go from job to job, hoping that somewhere they may find work a little more congenial and more interesting. As a result they acquire neither progressive skill nor the capacity for steady employment. Other children drift into occupations for which they are physically unfitted. Their health suffers temporarily or permanently and the injury that results has far-reaching social consequences.

Others, again, are without employment for some time after they leave school, for in many States the law does not require that the child first have a job before he is excused from school attendance. These children, free to roam on the streets, tend to become undisciplined and often fall into bad habits.

These conditions which confront the working child in times of peace were accentuated in war time. Now that the war has ceased there will be a shifting in industry. Large numbers of children now at work will doubtless be thrown out of employment because they will no longer be needed. Many children who have been accustomed to high wages will not readily accept the lower wages which will doubtless follow the end of the war. There will be others who will take the first job that offers in order to start earning as soon as possible. Many employers will prefer the children just leaving school to those who have already worked, and the child who has worked for some time will not want to return to school. Many children will be idle for long periods before finding work; they will require advice and assistance in regard to employment. If the children thrown out of positions can not be returned to the school

which they left, special classes should be provided for them and special training should be given them until employment is found.

Every effort should be made to keep in school those children whom the law permits to go to work.

#### WHAT ENGLAND HAS DONE.

England is much concerned with the problem of juvenile workers after the war and for several years has been working out a plan for protecting the industrial future of its children. This plan provides for supervision, during the first three years of their working lives, of the vast majority of children who leave the elementary schools. The establishment of a national system of labor exchanges, with separate juvenile departments, made some provision for the care of juvenile workers. It was found, however, that a juvenile department in a labor exchange would not in itself protect the children who were going to work. The closest cooperation with the schools was necessary. In 1910 the Education (Choice of Employment) Act gave the local education authorities power to—

Make arrangements, subject to the approval of the National Board of Education, for giving to boys and girls under seventeen years of age assistance with respect to the choice of suitable employment by means of the collection and the communication of information and the furnishing of advice; and on January 3, 1911, the President of the Board of Trade and the President of the Board of Education issued a joint memorandum outlining a scheme which provided for cooperation between local authorities exercising their power under the new act and the Board of Trade working through the labor exchanges.

The purpose of this scheme is as follows:

(A) To see that children on leaving school enter as far as possible the trade for which they are best suited. This involves a knowledge of the child's educational qualifications, physical condition, and his own and his parents' wishes as to employment.

(B) To see that children who enter "blind-alley" employment qualify themselves when possible to undertake other work by attendance at evening school and classes, clubs and similar societies.

(C) To provide for each child who is in need of advice and guidance a friend who will endeavor to keep the child in touch with healthy ideals and pursuits and watch over his industrial progress.

As this system is perfected the parents of all children should have the opportunity of obtaining expert advice as to suitable openings, while the future of every child will be a matter of active concern to those who have been interested in his education.

The supervision of juvenile labor in England has been looked upon for some time as a national responsibility and for the past four years even more thought has been given to the care of working children. In the report of the Great Britain Departmental Committee on Juvenile Education in Relation to Employment After the War it is urged that

all municipalities under the Education (Choice of Employment) Act be compelled "to set up machinery for dealing with adolescent labor," so that all children may have the benefit of advice and guidance and supervision after they start to work; that special classes be provided for children who are thrown out of employment after the war and that maintenance scholarships be granted to children whose earnings are needed at home in order that they may attend these classes until employment is found. It was urged, "in the national interest, that all children be given a good chance of health and satisfactory employment and above all of developing character and giving them life, not a living."

#### WHAT WE MIGHT DO.

It is quite urgent that we in this country, as a reconstruction measure and as a work that should be developed to meet the needs of over 2,000,000 children, should make some provision in every community to prevent the wastage that comes from a child's walking the streets in search of a job and still more from his haphazard choice of employment. No nation can or ought to afford this waste of human resources. These considerations call for some organization in the schools, or in connection with the schools, for supplying knowledge to those who seek it, and for offering guidance to those who need it, for assisting in finding suitable openings for children, and for supervising their employment and continued education. This scheme for following children into the industrial world should not only safeguard the working children but it should, if intelligently carried out, be of real value to the school.

The school through its contact with industries, with homes, and with neighborhoods and all the agencies that contribute toward the development of youth would be enabled to keep ever before it the fortunes of its children; it would be in a position to see where they succeed and where they fail and would be able to criticize intelligently the training which it gives as well as the occupations into which the children go; it would be better able also to plan the curriculum in the best interest of the child.

So far, in this country, little attention has been given to the after-school careers of boys and girls and only a few communities have provided any safeguards for their health or individual development or social efficiency. The Child Conservation Section of the Council of National Defense may aid in starting a piece of work which will be of great value to the child, to the school, and to society.

No attempt is made in this leaflet to outline a general plan or policy, or to go into the subject of vocational guidance and its relation to vocational education. Vocational guidance is still in its

experimental stage and general policies can not be formulated. It is intended only to point out the need for some machinery in the school, or in connection with the school, for adequately protecting children who leave school to go to work, and to offer suggestions to the local committees for meeting the problem in their own communities.

Most of the work accomplished along this line in the United States has been started by privately financed organizations and in a number of places has later been taken over by the schools.

In undertaking work of this sort it is important to get the cooperation of the schools and of the employers. In several cities where the salaries of the workers are paid by private organizations the work is carried on in the school under the supervision of the superintendent. While local committees may do much in stimulating public opinion and in organizing resources, the carrying out of the plan must be in the hands of some responsible and competent individual who is familiar with school problems and industrial conditions. If a person with such training and experience can not be found in the community a teacher might be selected to do the work. She should first, however, gather knowledge of local industries by visiting the shops, the offices, the factories, and by interviewing employers and labor officials, and children who have already worked. Perhaps there is no better way of learning about an occupation or the conditions in shops than through the experiences of working children. In order to find out what kind of work the children of a community are engaged in, the wages paid, and the opportunities for advancement the children from several schools who have been at work two or three years might be followed up by visits to their homes. This follow-up work done in close cooperation with the school should serve to bring the school in contact with working children and should give it valuable information to use in advising pupils. All facts and information concerning the occupations and industries in a community should be kept up to date, for conditions in industries are ever changing. This information would be helpful in advising the children and improving the schools and should be made available to the parents, the teachers, and the children themselves.

In some cities in this country and in England and Scotland booklets or leaflets on occupations open to boys and girls have been published. They give the requirements for entering an industry or an occupation, the character of the work, the advantages and disadvantages, the opportunities for advancement, the hours of labor, and the wages offered. Children should have such knowledge of opportunities open to them before they leave school.

## KEEPING CHILDREN IN SCHOOL.

In advising children who are leaving school for employment an effort should be made to reach them before they have obtained their employment certificates, for the first aim in any such undertaking should be to encourage boys and girls to remain in school longer. Children frequently leave school thoughtlessly; they are tired of school, they become restless, or they want to earn money. Often the parents are indifferent or fail to see the value of an education. On the other hand, they do not know conditions in industry and the few opportunities for skilled work open to children under 16 years of age. When parents are told that the number of good openings for children under 16 are limited; the advantages of getting a child well trained instead of making him an immediate wage earner; the material value to the child of health, character, and skill if he remains in school longer; of the training available that will fit the child for the work he would most like to do, the parents are often willing to keep the children in school longer and the children are more content to stay.

In one city where a bureau for advising and placing children has been established as a part of the school organization, every child who comes to the bureau is urged to return to school if, after consultation with the child, the parent, and the teacher, that seems the wise thing to do. As a result from 25 to 30 per cent of the children who come to the bureau are returned to school; sometimes this bureau finds it takes very little encouragement to accomplish this. It is only necessary to point out to the parents the advantages of an education and the poor opportunities open to boys and girls so young, to convince them that after all school is the best place for children. They find many children, however, who are leaving school because they do not like it. They are not being benefited by the regular school work; yet they would stay and make progress if the school offered industrial training to meet their needs. Where possible, these children are transferred to schools where they may get that training. Such a bureau should do much to encourage the extension of vocational and industrial training in the school.

This bureau found at first that it was useless to urge the children of very poor parents to return to school no matter how eager they were to continue their education, so, through this bureau, a scholarship fund was established by a volunteer committee to enable such children to remain in school longer.

A plan for advising and placing children should include some provision for giving scholarships to children who can not stay in school without such assistance because their earnings are needed for

the support of the family. A leaflet on scholarships for children has already been published by the Children's Bureau.

Talks might be given to children while they are still in school on the advantages of an education and the opportunities in school and industry open to boys and girls. These talks should not be made too general but should include facts relating to local industries and occupations that will be of practical value. Similar talks might be arranged for the parents. Such meetings might lead to conferences with individual parents, in which the plans for the child are discussed.

If a conference can not be held with the parents before the child leaves school, a letter might be sent to them from the school urging their cooperation in keeping the child in school longer and pointing out to them the dangers of sending a child to work too young.

In one city the following letter was sent to parents of children leaving school:

DEAR SIR OR MADAM:

YOUR (daughter or son) informs me that (she or he) does not expect to return to school. There is little chance for boys or girls to secure good work until they are 16 years of age. The trades never admit boys under 16, and few offices will employ boys or girls so young.

As a result, children who leave school at 14 are compelled to take up factory or errand work. This work may offer a good wage at the beginning, but it gives no training and does not prepare the boy or girl to earn a living in later life.

Much of the work open to children is seasonal, and the boys or girls are generally laid off after a few weeks. The result is that the majority of children work about half the time until they are 16. The rest of the time is spent in idleness, and they are on the streets, where they often get into trouble. By the time they are 16 they have little desire to work.

Since these are the conditions, we would like to help you in urging your child to continue in school until he (she) is at least 16 years of age. The schools offer training which prepares for work in a trade, including dressmaking, millinery, etc., for girls, and carpentry, electrical, and machine-shop work, pattern making, and mechanical drawing for boys, or for office work, including stenography, type-writing, and bookkeeping. Two more years of training will mean increased wages later.

We shall be glad to talk with you concerning future plans for your daughter or son if you will call at the office of the Bureau of Vocational Supervision.

In some cities the work of advising children is connected with the employment-certificate bureau. All the children leaving school then have the benefit of some advice and guidance before going to work. An effort may be made to return them to school, or if they must go to work they may be advised regarding employment and kept from

doing work that may be harmful. Any attempt to advise children means not only a thorough investigation into opportunities of employment open to children but a careful study of the particular child. It means interviews with the child before he leaves school to find out what he wants to do and thinks he can do; interviews with the parents in the home, if possible, to find out what their ambitions are for the child and along what lines they think his capabilities lie; and interviews with the teacher to learn what she believes him to be fitted for mentally and physically.

#### PLACEMENT.

If there is no hope of keeping the child in school longer, then there is the selection from among all the available jobs that can be found of the job to which the child seems best adapted. Frequently it is necessary to persuade a child to give up a job that offers a high wage but has no future and to persuade him and his parents that it is better to take a job where he will learn as well as earn, though the wage at first may be smaller. Then it is important to keep in constant communication with the child after he has been placed in employment.

Placement saves the child from the dangers of wandering the streets in search of a job and from choosing a job haphazardly. Better ways of getting work are needed and the community must do what it can to take the matter out of the realm of chance. The placement of boys and girls under 18 years of age is an educational problem.

Up to the age of 18, at least, schooling should never cease. Too early employment should be discouraged and when it is unavoidable it should be regarded from the standpoint of its effect upon the development of the child physically, mentally, and morally. In placing children in occupations the present welfare of the child should be the first consideration rather than the immediate earnings of the child or the benefit of the family or of the employer.

The task of placing children should be in the hands of some one who possesses educational ideals and who knows school problems and the opportunities for training as thoroughly as he or she knows conditions in industry. A very close relationship exists between the school career and the industrial career of the child. The schools then should be brought into close touch with industries.

England found that the closest connection must exist between the school and the juvenile-labor exchange if the best possible chance was to be given the child. In that country the juvenile department of the labor exchange is under the supervision of the school. The Education (Choice of Employment) Act, 1910, gave the education authorities power to appoint a central care committee to bring about co-

operation between the school and the juvenile-labor exchange. The central care committee has the power to advise as to employment, to exercise a decisive voice in the placement of juveniles, to appoint members to be in attendance at the juvenile exchange, to determine the location of the juvenile employment office, to follow up through the school care committee the children who have been placed. Under this scheme the school records of the children are available to those in charge of the placement work, as are also the school physicians' reports, which are necessary in placing children but which would not be readily accessible to an employment bureau not connected with the schools. Children and parents who would not otherwise do so make use of the bureau because it is under the supervision of the school.

In a number of cities in this country the schools have undertaken placement work. The placement bureau should cooperate with employers and urge them to notify it whenever there are vacancies. One advantage in having the placement of boys and girls closely identified with the schools is that if there are no available jobs children may be retained in school until there is an opening. Another reason for conducting the juvenile placement office in close relation to the school lies in the fact that in most States the school issues the employment certificates to children who work and is in a position to develop a follow-up system which would strengthen the enforcement of the child-labor laws. A placement office which operates in connection with the employment-certificate office has an advantage in that it is sure of getting in contact with every child of employment-certificate age leaving school.

In some communities there are already well-organized free employment bureaus that may be able to handle the placement of juveniles. All employment work should, if possible, be centralized to serve all classes of people. The juvenile department should, however, be separate from the adult departments. There should be some form of joint control by the school and the juvenile-employment office, so that the employment bureau will serve both as a school office and a placement office. A committee composed of school people, employers, and labor officials might be appointed to bring about cooperation between the juvenile-employment office and the school.

The Boys' Working Reserve, in connection with the Employment Service of the United States Department of Labor is planning to provide junior counselors in the local branches of the Employment Service whose first duty will be to make an effort to return to school boys under 18 who apply for positions. If argument fails and the boy insists on going to work, the counselor will urge that he take only a position well suited to his future development. The coun-

selor will also arrange, if possible, for the boy to take up a continuation course of study suited to the applicant's capabilities.

If the school is to continue its contact with the working child and provide for his training after he has entered employment, the placement of children should be carried on at least in connection with the school.

#### SUPERVISION OF WORKING CHILDREN.

It is not sufficient that a child be advised regarding his employment; it is not enough merely to place him in a position. It is quite important to know that he has been suitably placed. In order that the school may be able to test the value of its work, it should know the progress of the child from the point of view of the parent, the child, and the employer. A child may have been placed in a position for which he is physically unfitted, or he may have secured work which is of a temporary nature or which offers no opportunity for advancement; it is desirable to find him other employment. He may need further training in order to advance in the work he has chosen; he should be informed where he may get that training. A child may want to change his job frequently; it is necessary to counteract the aimless drifting or to see that, if a change is advisable, it is made for the child's benefit and that there is no interval of unemployment between jobs.

It may be thought that the supervision should be left to the parents. If supervision meant nothing more than looking after the child, it should; but it means testing and revising the work of the school, it means bettering conditions in industry. And the cooperation of the parents is necessary in any such undertaking.

In parts of England and Scotland a scheme for following up children who have left school to go to work has been developed by the local school care committees, which are appointed for each elementary school and work in cooperation with the juvenile-employment offices. These have demonstrated their usefulness in the last few years and England is now urging that this plan of after care be developed in every community after the war.

Employment supervision in this country would not only benefit the individual child, but the knowledge obtained concerning the conditions under which children work would undoubtedly awaken public opinion and would lead to higher minimum standards for all children.

No general schemes have so far been devised in this country for supervising the employment of children. In a few cities children have been followed up by the school after they have gone to work, but little attempt has so far been made to supervise the employment

of the great mass of children who leave school at an early age and who need help and guidance.

A few States, through legislation, have an opportunity to supervise the employment of children. This legislation provides that no child shall leave school until he has a position in view. The employment certificate issued by the superintendent of schools is mailed to the employer instead of being given to the child. When the child is discharged or leaves his position for any reason, the certificate is mailed back to the school authorities, who know immediately that the child is not at work and so should see that he is returned to school until he secures another position. If the child must return to the employment-certificate office of the school each time he changes positions, the school has an opportunity to question the child regarding his employment, to find out why he left his position, to advise him and to help him choose the next job more wisely. This plan enables the school to collect a vast amount of information regarding the industrial careers of children, and the information thus obtained should serve to assist the schools in planning the curriculum for the benefit of the children. The certificate office is given a measure of supervision over working children up to the age of 16 and is enabled to enforce the regulations about the kinds of work permitted children as well as those concerning the hours of employment. This scheme is not effective unless the law is well enforced and unless the school provides some one to offer advice and assistance to children who return for new employment certificates.

A scheme for placement and supervision of juveniles is not complete unless it includes some provision for further training.

#### CONTINUATION CLASSES.

In order that working children may be trained to be efficient in their work and may be able to lift themselves out of the blind-alley jobs in which they find themselves upon leaving school and entering industry, they should have an opportunity to attend continuation classes. In order to be effective these classes should be compulsory and should be held in the daytime. No employer should be allowed to engage a child except under conditions which will enable the child to attend on the employer's time. When the child is out of employment his hours at continuation classes might be increased until employment is found. With the establishment of continuation schools all children up to the age of 18 would be under the guiding influence of the school and would have an opportunity to increase their industrial efficiency.

England as a reconstruction measure made provision in the new Education Act which was passed by Parliament in August, 1918, for

day continuation classes for employed children from 14 to 18 years of age. In this country only a few States have legislation providing for continuation schools. The Federal law, known as the Smith-Hughes Act, provides that one-half of the sum expended for salaries of teachers of vocational studies will be returned to the local communities from the National Treasury. The quality of this instruction is standardized. This law will undoubtedly influence States to make provision for continuation schools.

The Child Conservation Section, with its State organizations reaching into every community in the State, has an opportunity to stir public opinion and to push legislation providing for the establishment of continuation schools, and to see that the schools in every community provide for such instruction. It might be well for local committees to get in touch with the Federal Board for Vocational Education and the State department of education, which in many cases includes a vocational education board, to find out how the committees might help to start continuation schools in their communities.

Perhaps no constructive work that may be undertaken is more important than the work of advising children in their choice of employment and supervising them during the first few years of their working lives. The Child Conservation Section of the Field Division of the Council of National Defense, in cooperation with the schools, has an opportunity to render a service that will affect not only the welfare of the children in helping them to get the proper start in life but also the educational, industrial, physical, and spiritual health of the community.

