

Chapter 1

The History of Career and Technical Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the history of career and technical education in the United States beginning with its earliest forms in the 16th and 17th centuries and continuing on through present-day society. Chronologically formatted, the primary focus is on how the nation's domestic and international issues during each time period affected the development of vocational education, leading to major federal government legislation. Following a brief introduction of the subject, the background section will provide the reader with basic definitions of career and technical education as discussed by various authors, noting the changes of such definitions over the years. The main body of the chapter is divided into several sections based upon time periods. Each section will discuss national issues and major legislation reflecting changes in vocational education. Finally, the future of career and technical education will be examined, followed by a brief conclusion.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Career and technical education programs have been around for hundreds of years in one form or another. Well before this nation was founded, fathers and mothers were passing on important survival skills to their children (Evans, 1971; Keller, 1948). The first forms of formal education of any type were reserved for religious teachings

and groups (Keller, 1948). However, as the needs of the people changed, so did education. In this nation, vocational education began in the form of apprenticeships in an effort to ensure that various aspects of community work were efficiently and effectively completed (Barlow, 1974; Brewer, Campbell, & Petty, 2000; Keller). With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, apprenticeships were no longer capable of providing all of the necessary training to operate the new forms of machinery

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(Barlow). Since that time, technological changes and the nation's workforce needs have dictated the direction of vocational education in the United States.

This chapter will demonstrate the various changes that career and technical education has undergone over the years. It will provide background information on these types of programs, including the changes in definition that vocational education has undergone over time. Furthermore, it will specifically discuss how the issues and controversies related to the history of our nation have affected the status of vocational education, as well as how federal legislation has attempted to solve some of these issues. Finally future trends for the field of career and technical education will be presented, followed by a brief conclusion.

1.2 BACKGROUND

Over the years, vocational education has gone through many changes in meaning and scope. In general, vocational education is characterized by teaching a skill or skills to students that will be useful in the workplace. However, this explanation does not satisfactorily describe the dimensions of vocational education, especially in how it is used in today's society. A review of literature provides a wide variety of perspectives on the subject, as well as descriptions of vocational education as it has changed over time.

F. J. Keller, a notable historian on this subject, looked at vocational education in a unique way. Instead of simply describing a method of educating students, Keller believed that vocational education was actually a way of living one's life (Keller, 1948). He believed that vocational educators were charged not only with teaching specific skills, but also with teaching students how to live and act in the workplace and in society. He attributed the first form of vocational education, to monks, going as far back in history as the 7th century. Even before more structured forms of apprenticeships

evolved, Keller claimed that monks were teaching each other the skills needed to conduct research and teach, along with necessary life lessons needed to live a productive life in the monastery (Keller, 1948).

Eventually, the greater society began to see the benefits of this type of teaching, and apprenticeships became the common standard of passing on vital work skills to others during the colonial period of our nation's history. Several authors have defined apprenticeships as forms of education where a master provides direct instruction of mastering a skill to a student, or apprentice (Barlow, 1974; Evans, 1971; Keller, 1948; Kneller, 1963; Miller, 1993). As discussed in future sections below, some masters expanded their teachings to include other basic educational components, such as reading and writing (Barlow, 1974; Kneller, 1963; Miller, 1993). Many apprenticeships, especially during this time period, also included room and board for the students (Barlow, 1974).

It was during the Industrial Revolution, beginning in the late 18th century, that apprenticeships became obsolete and the more contemporary forms of vocational education were founded (Barlow, 1974). Barlow (1974) attributes much of this change to two movements during the 19th century: the practical arts movement and the trade school movement. While these movements are discussed in more detail in future sections, the core concepts of such movements are important in understanding the early definitions of vocational education. The practical arts movement provided skill-based learning by developing unique curriculum, such as domestic science and agriculture courses (Barlow, 1974). However, this movement also continued to stress the importance of general education. The trade school movement, in contrast, focused specifically on teaching a trade in a more formalized way than apprenticeships had been able to do (Barlow, 1974). Thus began the debate as to how much general education should be included in vocational education.

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