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**The Employment of Children
and Young Persons in
Canada**



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APPENDIX

Extracts from *An Experimental Study of Children at Work and in School between the Ages of Fourteen and Eighteen Years* by Helen T. Woolley, Ph.D., formerly Director of the Vocation Bureau of Cincinnati. This volume was based on a five-year study of over 700 working children and about 600 school children in Cincinnati:¹

Age of leaving school.

"The question of what is the correct upper limit for compulsory education is one which has given much concern to educators and to those interested in preventing harmful child labour. Much of the discussion has hinged upon the question of what the schools have to offer adolescent children and what industry has to offer them. Educators and social workers have very generally arrived at an agreement that fourteen years is a minimum age for leaving school. At present the tendency is to advance compulsory education to sixteen years. In the light of the present study I should like to discuss the matter from the standpoint of the rate of mental and physical development of adolescent children. So little has been known scientifically in this realm, except in terms of physical growth, that such considerations have not played as large a part as they might in guiding policies.

It seems sufficiently evident that the years of very rapid growth, physical and mental, should be spent in school rather than in industry. This study has shown, that on the whole, school furnishes a better background for physical development than industry in that school children are always ahead of working children. It is even more evident that school furnishes a better background for mental development. The period of rapid mental growth should be one in which the acquisition of knowledge and of fundamental skills is the chief concern of the child. This study has shown that the years of rapid development are not the same for the two sexes and not the same for superior and inferior individuals.

If sex were to be made the basis of difference in the age of leaving school, as has been done in some states, there would be more reason for allowing girls to leave school earlier than boys. . . . Since it is, as we have seen, chiefly the inferior children who drop out of school as early as the law permits, the age of school-leaving should be determined by the period at which the inferior group completes the years of rapid mental and physical growth. Sixteen years is the age which seems justified on this ground. By that age girls have unquestionably completed their years of rapid development. The year between sixteen and seventeen is important in the development of some of the boys. If the age is to be uniform for the two sexes, sixteen constitutes the best compromise. . . .

The objection to the sixteen-year age limit for leaving school has come in part from the school itself and is based upon the fact that inferior children cannot keep up the academic pace of the traditional school until the age of sixteen. They merely become retarded and discouraged, develop a sense of inferiority, form bad habits of truancy, and sometimes become delinquent. This is all quite true, but the solution of the problem should be that of changing the type of school to fit the child rather than that of eliminating the child from school. Surely some legitimate content of education can be found to keep these inferior children profitably and happily employed during their years of most rapid mental and physical acquisition.

Scholarships for superior children.

"This study has shown clearly the tendency for superior children to remain in school. The policy of keeping them in school is obviously a wise one. Scholarships for this purpose have been advocated by many and are actually in force in some of our large cities, notably New York, Chicago, and Cincinnati. . . . This study has shown, first, that on the ground of ability not more than one-fourth of those who leave school as early as the law permits could be considered possible candidates for scholarships. It has shown further that of this fourth, many have belonged in families in which the conditions were unfavourable to a continued school career. Either the family atmosphere was so bad as to distract the child from an interest in school or the ideals of the family were definitely in favour of early withdrawal from school. . . . The number of children who have the ability to profit by education beyond sixteen years, who have the desire to continue, and who need financial aid to help them to do so, is comparatively small. . . . The terrific disadvantage under

¹ MacMillan Co., New York, 1926. 762 pp.

which children of superior mental ability without education labour has been made clear in this study. They can secure for themselves no advantage in terms of wage-earning. Their advantage in terms of type of work performed consists only in the choice of inferior grades of office work or minor sales positions instead of machine-tending in factories. When we consider the fact that some of these children would be capable of making a real contribution to the industrial, the social, the educational, or the aesthetic life of the community, it seems an obvious point of good social policy to give them whatever advantage education can supply.

Provision for individual diagnosis in the school system.

"If the school is to fulfil its ideal function of providing each child with as much education as he can profitably take and with the kind of education suited to his capacities, then provision for mental and physical diagnosis of children must be made in the school. It is generally recognized that medical service for the discovery of physical defects which are interfering with school progress is a legitimate part of school procedure. It is less generally conceded that provision for adequate mental diagnosis and the discovery of mental difficulties which may be interfering with school progress is equally necessary. If it is true that levels of ability differ widely, it must follow that education needs to be adapted to level ability.

Probably few would question this general assertion. The doubt enters in when we ask ourselves whether we have any way of diagnosing the level of ability accurately. No one questions the difficulty of the task or the chance of error in the individual case. Nevertheless, recent educational experiments as well as the data presented in this study and in a host of others show that the proper use of mental tests aids greatly in forming a correct judgment of the level of ability of the child. What needs to be emphasized is that a mere mental-test result is not sufficient. The factors of health, of the home background of the child, and of educational history up to the time when the test is made must all be taken into consideration. There can be no real doubt, however, that a psychological laboratory in the hands of a properly qualified expert can enable a school system to make a far better classification of its children with reference to their ability to progress in school than can be done without it. . . . That the system of mental testing is open to abuses there can be no doubt. Too often the mere result of a mental test—even of a group mental test—has been given undue weight in the judgment of the child. To interpret a test result in the light of other findings requires trained judgment and experience. The fact that mental tests may be abused and their results misinterpreted constitutes no more reason for opposing them than the same reason would lead us to do away with medical drugs or courts of justice. Our efforts should be centered on securing a wise use of the tests by insisting upon adequate training and preparation on the part of those who use them, and by improving the technique of the tests themselves and increasing our knowledge of the inter-relationship of mental-test level with other factors of personality.

In addition to the psychological laboratory, the school needs a means of making social diagnoses, such as are contributed by the modern visiting teacher. Next to the mental level of the child, home atmosphere and ideals have been shown to be the most potent factors in determining school progress. The modern educator must regard all of the factors that further or retard the progress of children in school as relevant to his task. . . . Theoretically the school is an adjunct to the home, created for the purpose of assisting parents in their task of bringing up children, and yet only too often the education of the home and that of the school are conducted quite independently of one another. Something of the technique of social case work, as developed by the social worker, must be taken over by the school in its investigation of the extra-school-room conditions which are interfering with school progress. The visiting teacher is the pioneer who is blazing the trail in method, but her lead must draw after it a host of followers before the general need is met.

As far as machinery is concerned, the attendance department of the school holds the strategic position. The difficulty with our present attendance officers is that they have the traditions of the police officer rather than those of the social worker. Their function has been in the past merely to arrest and haul into school truant children. The attendance officer of the future should have the function now being performed by the visiting teacher: that of diagnosing the conditions of home and neighbourhood which are interfering with school progress and of doing what can be done to correct such conditions. To fulfil these functions more officers would be required, and the standards of training and preparation would have to be made more rigid and different in kind. When the attendance departments of the schools are transformed into departments of social diagnosis and treatment, the school will be equipped to deal with a phase of education which is at present sadly neglected. . . .

Vocational training and vocational guidance.

"Those whose chief interest has been in vocational guidance have long seen that vocational guidance and educational guidance cannot be separated but are parts of one continuous process. The only vocational advice really worth giving to a child is advice to secure a specific kind of training. Such advice must be given, however, before the child leaves school and while there is yet time to secure the training. The fundamental problem, therefore, is that of educational guidance. If educational guidance is well done and proper means of vocational training are available, most of the problem of vocational guidance is solved by the time the child is ready to leave school.

The principle on which educators in this field have been proceeding is that our first obligation is to secure to every child as much general education as he is capable of taking and at a pace suited to his level of capacity. Our second obligation we have regarded as that of securing to every child some specific preparation for wage-earning before he completes his education. The point at which vocational education should begin seems to be dependent upon the capacities and interests of the child. For some children vocational education should be postponed until after the completion of a college course, when the child is ready to enter upon his professional training. These are the very superior children of the community. For those at the other end of the scale it might be necessary to begin vocational education as early as the twelfth or fourteenth year of age, before the child leaves the elementary school. It is the second element of this program upon which the present study throws doubt. We have been assuming that some content of vocational education could be found for every child in the school system. We are now beginning to question whether this is true for the group of children of very inferior ability. It still remains unquestionably true for superior children, those of the upper half of the level of ability. For them, the professions, the administrative positions in industry and commerce, various phases of public life, and the arts still offer scope for a wide variety of specific preparation.

The situation for the child of somewhat inferior ability, those in the lowest fourth or half of our group of working children, is totally different. Our former theory was that the children of this group should be trained for some phase of skilled manual work, but the demand for the skilled manual worker is decreasing very rapidly in the industrial world. The rapid increase in machine production of all kinds means that the modern industrial world needs more and more machine-tenders and fewer and fewer skilled mechanics. Even in the realm of office work the same tendency is observed. The modern office needs more and more comptometrists and typists and fewer and fewer book-keepers, stenographers, and secretaries. Doubtless the demands for training in what remains of skilled work is higher than ever before. The kind of expert who can keep the machines of to-day in order and repair them, and still more one who can improve them or invent new ones, needs more training than the older type of skilled mechanic. Doubtless the same principle holds in the new type of office work. It requires a greater expert to plan and supervise the complicated office force of the large modern office than was the stenographer of the past. In short, the administrative and supervising positions in commerce and industry seem to be making greater and greater demands upon the individual and requiring more and more adequate preparation. This entire field is unquestionably the legitimate province of vocational training. We have seen, however, that many of our children, perhaps as many as a fourth or a third, will be compelled to earn a living at processes so routine in type that they offer no content for vocational training. Doubtless, office work even of the routine type done by the comptometrist and typist still demands training. There is content here for a course of at least a year in length. The same does not hold true of the machine-tending work of the factories. Most of the jobs of the modern factory can be learned in a few weeks by those of very limited intelligence and learned better in the factory than in the school. It requires more than a few weeks to develop maximum speed on a machine, but the acquisition of speed on a machine would not in any case become an educational project.

Our study has shown that the type of factory work open to young beginners can be performed satisfactorily by the poorest 10 per cent of our working children. This means approximately the poorest 5 per cent of the total school population. These children make more satisfactory workers than the more intelligent ones in the sense that they are better content and remain longer on the machine-tending jobs. They earn as much as the superior children of the same age and of three years more of schooling. They are as well able to secure work. That the work open to from 25 to 50 per cent of our children is of such a nature that the poorest 5 per cent are adequate to do it must mean that the rest will be compelled to earn a living by routine work which makes little demand upon their ability and offers no scope for educational preparation.

The dilemma of the school consists in the fact that the children whose future work is without educational content are the very ones who cannot keep up to the standards of traditional school work. They are incapable of doing the older type of school work normally and they need no preparation for the technique of wage-earning. As yet, this dilemma has been in no way met by the school. For the most part, even yet, the inferior children merely fail, become retarded in school, and leave school as early as the law permits with no preparation for life except that of having failed in school.

Until very recently the school has not even felt a sense of responsibility with regard to the children who drop out early. The general attitude toward them was that if they could not profit by the education offered them, that was their fault and the school was in no way responsible. Leaving school was the only possible outcome. The whole system has been dominated by a desire to prepare children for the next higher educational level. The efforts of the elementary school have been centered upon preparing children for high school and those of the high school on preparing children for college. Doubtless preparation for more education is one entirely legitimate and exceedingly important purpose of the school, but when it dominates education to such an extent that nothing adequate is accomplished in preparation for living for almost half of the school population, the tendency needs to be curbed. Now that scientific methods have made it possible to determine fairly early in a school career which children will be able to profit by prolonged training of the academic type and which ones are sure to be limited in accomplishment, there is still less excuse for merely selecting the superior and rejecting the inferior.

No educator really believes that allowing the inferior children to leave school, after the required number of years of academic failure, is a good educational policy. It has been allowed to go on merely because the school has not known how to meet the situation. Now that specific vocational training seems to be eliminated, the school is in a still more difficult position. It must try to find out how best to fit children of limited mental ability for a life in which wage-earning will take the form of monotonous labour. Let me suggest two elements in a solution of the problem. The first consists in the attempt to change the attitude of the child toward, and his type of interest in, his job. The second consists in more stress on preparation for a wise use of leisure time.

Much of the discussion of the modern industrial problem has taken the attitude that monotonous labour is necessarily injurious to the worker and that, therefore, the only legitimate attitude for education was to seek methods of reducing the amount of monotonous labour in industry. For education to undertake to stem the tide of machine methods of production with its subdivisions of labour and lead the world back to the period of production by the individual skilled artisan is to undertake the manifestly impossible. Mass production by machinery and the subdivision of labour represent the irresistible trend of the whole industrial world. . . . What we need to do is to examine in a more scientific spirit the nature of monotonous processes, the length of time during which they can be maintained without injury to the worker, and their effect upon the worker under varying conditions. . . .

We have said that the second factor which helps to determine the attitude of the worker towards his job is that of the content of the rest of his life. If the hours of labour must be made short, then the way in which the worker spends his free time becomes of increasing importance. In other words, more and more stress must be placed upon education for leisure.

Only too often in discussing education for leisure, we talk as though the pursuit of cultural aims, such as art, music, literature, and the drama, were the only proper ones for leisure time. That they constitute a valuable use of leisure time for those who are capable of their pursuit there can be no question. There is as little doubt that more should be done by the school to foster an understanding of music, drama, and the arts, and a love for them than is done at present. . . . In discussing the group of children of somewhat inferior mental level, we must not lose sight of the fact that many of them will prove to be exceedingly limited in their æsthetic capacity as well as in their intellectual status. It is absurd to suppose that the majority of them could be led to devote the hours not employed in wage-earning to music, art, or literature, though doubtless some of them could. These same children, however, are capable of many simpler types of productive occupations, provided they are taught. Cooking and sewing for the girls, even though they have no immediate wage-earning value, are of great value as occupational resources. There is but a limited demand for dressmakers in the modern world, but there is an unlimited possibility for young women who wish to do so to make their own clothes in their leisure time. For the boys, gardening, wood-working, simple electrical work, and some kinds of metal work offer similar resources. Up to this time the occupations which we have just been discussing have been taught in the schools under the head of vocational training and with the idea that the children could use them for wage-

earning. Now we are becoming convinced that there is little or no immediate wage-earning value in these disciplines. However, our conclusion is not that they should be taken out of the schools, but that they should be taught as personal resources for the children—in other words, as a part of general education rather than as part of vocational education.

The aim of the school should be to teach each child some type of productive work suited to his capacities and interests, and furthermore, to teach him how to conduct it individually as a personal enterprise. In short, the variety of occupations taught in the schools, from this point of view, should be increased and not decreased. The foes of vocational education who wish to exclude all types of training for manual work from the schools and reduce the curriculum to the traditional academic disciplines can gain small comfort from this point of view. If everything that we now class as vocational training or domestic science or art in the schools were excluded tomorrow, on the ground that it had no further wage-earning value, we should find ourselves compelled to put it back again the next day, enlarged and developed, because it has a very high value as training for life. . . .

The task of the school with regard to the inferior children seems, then, to be this. We must look forward to preparing many children to earn a living at a process which has only remote interest and value, and make it possible for them to do so without injuring them by giving them genuine resources which will lend zest, interest, and vitality to the hours not occupied by the drudgery of earning a living. . . ."