

Shaina Premraj

Mrs. Small

Humanities

12 October 2023

Irreplaceable or Replaceable Vocational Education?

With dwindling percentages of adults in the U.S. perceiving college education as important, the skills individuals are taught in high school are important now more than ever. While college is not always the path that students take after high school, vocational schools aid in this process of entering the job force fresh out of high school. Vocational education is defined as education programs in which the courses are correlated with preparing individuals for employment in emerging occupations such as welding and carpentry that require degrees outside of a baccalaureate or advanced degree. Vocational schools such as trade schools, offer secondary or postsecondary education to high school students with an even split between core academic classes and shops which specialize in certain fields. From the perspective of social mobility—the incentive to fill jobs about the skillset of the individual,—vocational schools offer a practical education that aids in training them firsthand for the job force, however, the extent of emphasis on these programs requires questioning. With a focus on hands-on learning and less on core classes, trade schools have both advantages and disadvantages. The implementation of vocational education skills in a standard public school setting is only useful to an extent in aiding students' futures, and should not be emphasized more than the traditional subjects in which students partake due to the importance it may play in their subsequent endeavors.

In a trade school, there is an even split between traditional core classes and shop classes which specialize in the students' prime interests. While this is beneficial in aiding them with

mapping out their future if they have already committed to a specific trade, this can also harm them unintentionally. Grodman explains how “[t]he skills taught in trade school are very particular and may not be transferable to roles outside of specific niches,' '(Grodman) meaning the chance that they work in the best interests of the individual is not guaranteed. With the heavy implementation and emphasis on vocational learning especially in schools such as trade schools, students are limited as to what they can achieve in the future. Some may say that shops aid in allowing students to gain hands-on experience, and while this may be true, the overall reduction in the amount of time in classes such as biology may end up harming the student. In other words, the split between shop and core classes in these schools is bound to take away crucial class time that may end up not fully preparing the student in the way that a traditional school would.

In other words, the skill set that they leave high school with is not a diverse or varied one, meaning that they could be forced into one path in life. This would be extremely harmful in the case that they are experimenting with their shops during high school, and end up leaving high school and realizing that the shop or shops they partook in were not what they truly desire for a career. While they can still change paths in college, this ultimate transition is made increasingly more difficult. In addition to this, it was observed that “[a]lthough opportunities in many vocational fields will likely grow over time, not all vocational fields have substantial projected growth rates”(Grodman). This ultimate domino effect will leave them scrambling for a job and will not ultimately equip them for their future endeavors. Further, when one may decide that they want to change career paths, having a past vocational learning experience will deter them from their ability to adapt easily to a new path, reducing their overall willingness to even have motivation for this change.

To further this point, with the emphasis on learning skills that one may never use in their future, there is less of an opportunity to immerse oneself in additional core subjects that may benefit them. In an orthodox school setting, students have several opportunities through various electives to take various classes in addition to their core classes. This allows them to explore their interests, while not compromising their necessary education standards. In an analysis of the trends in education, it was stated that “[i]n a traditional academic school program, students have opportunities to explore different subjects and disciplines outside their core topics for their future degrees”(Bedi). Not only is this effective, but allows students to try out varying classes without the pressure of having to ensure that they will excel in it. In other words, one could take a manufacturing course and end up deciding that it is not interesting to them, and be able to drop or not continue the class another semester without the pressure of needing to be proficient. The pressure that school already brings is exhausting as is, and this added pressure on one's future is unnecessary and not often required to succeed.

This unique opportunity not only ensures the best interests of the student are prioritized but also ensures that they do not fall behind on their core classes as a vocational school might normalize. In an observation on vocational education within the United States in the late nineteenth century, it was said that “20 percent of 1992 high school graduates who earned 8 or more vocational credits and about 25 percent of those who earned 4 or more occupationally specific credits did not take a single occupational course above the introductory level” (Vocational Education in the United States: The Early 1990s). While taking advanced occupational courses is not a requirement in these schools, the drive for students to achieve their greatest is not always apparent. Although this percentage may appear to be low, when taken into perspective it is hundreds of students who did not challenge themselves and strive to take an

advanced course that could bring them outside of their comfort zone. Overall the students' incentive to work harder and push themselves as a whole is lessened in a vocational school as there is no requirement or as much encouragement as in a traditional school.

While vocational schools such as trade schools may allow students to expedite their education so they can enter the job force swiftly, the normal timeline that a traditional school has been found to lead to peak success. With the thirteen years of public school that an individual takes from kindergarten to senior year of high school, this tried and true timeline has been proven to have high graduation rates. On the other hand, a vocational school that potentially offers an expedited high school experience to reduce it from four to two years, may not always be the wise solution to getting out of school early. The fact that “[g]raduates earning more credits in vocational education were less likely than graduates with fewer accumulated vocational credits to meet the standards in each subject area...”(Vocational Education in the United States: The Early 1990s), expands on this point. High school graduates in the United States who focused more on earning course credit through vocational education were less likely to meet standards in each subject than those who took fewer of these classes. This indicates that while vocational classes are beneficial and can lead to success in life, they should not be emphasized more than the core subjects such as mathematics and foreign languages.

With the gradual increase of high school dropouts in the United States, prioritizing teaching vocational skills even more is fundamentally pointless and will only benefit select individuals. A statistic taken in the United States discovered that while the “[l]ack of focused course-taking was not restricted to the vocational curriculum,”(Vocational Education in the United States: The Early 1990s) there was an evident case of this in vocational schools. With the incentive to expedite one’s high school experience and potentially not attend college, there is

often a lack of motivation to do one's best. Rather, individuals will think to themselves that they must just get this two-year program done, and give no regard to understanding the course nor take a moment to fully comprehend the importance of both the core and shop classes they take. Vocational learning works for some, but for the majority, a traditional school education with an emphasis on core classes should be encouraged.

Ultimately, vocational education can be beneficial to students as they leave high school and enter college or go directly into the job force, however, this is not an excuse to put as much emphasis on them as trade schools do. Spanning from limited career growth to the lack of ability to explore additional classes, to even the harms of an expedited program, vocational education should not have as much emphasis as core academic classes in the education system.

Works Cited

Bedi, Sidhant. "The Pros and Cons of Vocational Education Training." *Hospitality News &*

Business Insights by EHL

hospitalityinsights.ehl.edu/pros-cons-vocational-education-training#:~:text=Less%20of%20an%20opportunity%20to%20explore%20different%20subjects&text=In%20a%20voctional%20setting%2C%20however,classes%20well%20outside%20their%20discipline.

Accessed 8 Oct. 2023.

Grodman, Stefanie. "The 5 Biggest Challenges of Trade School: BestColleges."

BestColleges.Com, 24 May 2023,

www.bestcolleges.com/trades/5-trade-school-challenges/.

Simmons, Liz. "The Pros and Cons of Trade School: BestColleges." *BestColleges.Com*, 24 May

2023,

www.bestcolleges.com/resources/career-training/pros-and-cons-trade-school/#:~:

ext=Limited%20Career%20Growth,-Although%20trade%20school&text=Managerial%20or%20supervisory%20jobs%20often,a%20worker%27s%20future%20job%20opportunities.

"What Is Vocational Education?" *Vocational Education in the US*,

nces.ed.gov/pubs/web/95024-2.asp. Accessed 8 Oct. 2023.