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Vocationalism And Its Promoters In British Columbia, 1900-1929

Despite the steady erosion of public confidence in schools during recent years, faith in education's efficacy remains strong. Schools are still commonly believed to be potent institutions for fostering democracy, justice, economic development, and upward social mobility. In Canada politicians and educators advocate that "career education" and going "back to basics" will help solve the problems of a slumping economy and apparently weakened social fabric.¹ Although some regard contemporary concern for restructuring schools as unprecedented, both in its dimension and vigor, this is largely due to the fact that most take schools for granted, and thus require "little or no explanation of their origin, or justification for their continuing existence."² The drive for social change through public education, however, has existed since the mid-nineteenth century in Canada. In British Columbia, for instance, the educational system was dramatically overhauled between 1900 and 1929, often in accordance with social reformers' suggestions. The administration grew and became more expert, teachers were better trained, the curriculum was differentiated, and vocational instruction, guidance, testing, and junior high schools were implemented.³ This paper examines one strand of that school reform as education's societal relationships changed and adapted with the transition to a maturing urban industrial province.

I

Industrialization quickly followed the CPR's arrival in British Columbia in 1886. While entrepreneurs became wealthy with dramatic expansion in mining, forestry, and construction, the prosperity was not shared by most workers. Instead, the labouring class bore most of the brunt of economic expansion as workers often coped with severe depression, spiraling inflation, chronic unemployment, unsafe work, poor housing, and cheap Oriental labour. The province was fertile ground for radical politics, and by the twentieth century an articulate and militant labour movement emerged, sometimes under the guidance of British and American socialists. Workers reacted to unfair job competition, harsh working conditions, and rigid industrial disciplines by staging anti-Oriental riots and protracted strikes resulting in widespread violence and extensive property damage. Moreover, a syndicalist challenge to the existing political establishment culminated in 1919 with the "revolutionary" uprising in Western Canada. The wealthy propertied classes feared dissent as they experienced the country's most strike-prone workers between 1890 and 1920.⁴

Out of fear, vested interest, and Christian humanitarianism, middle and upper middle class reformers tried to ameliorate severe social conditions of working people and their families. They promoted city beautification, Fresh Air Funds, and public health measures; extended municipal utilities; and enacted labour legislation to protect working men, women, and children from the excesses of the industrial workplace. As an illustration, the Civic Improvement League sought to

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organize "in each community those social forces" which made for "efficient Canadian citizenship."⁵ In 1915 the federal Department of Labour concluded that "industrial efficiency" depended upon whether workers laboured and lived under "wholesome conditions," or under circumstances which depressed their "physical vitality" and left them "less satisfied as citizens and less useful as members of the race."⁶ Earlier the federal government had passed the 1907 Industrial Disputes Investigation Act which provided compulsory investigation of labour troubles. In addition, Ottawa regulated Oriental immigration to protect workers from unfair job competition.

The provincial government also responded to social protest and dislocation. Besides dispatching the militia several times to impose industrial peace, the province passed labour legislation regulating hours of work and safety standards, and established the Workmen's Compensation Board in 1916. Similarly, the 1919 provincial Royal Commission studying the merits of health insurance, mothers' pensions, maternity benefits, and public health nursing reflected the governing class's anxiety over social unrest. Although the report was never published, its authors thought that insured medical and supporting services promoted social order by undermining radical politics and by preventing pauperism, vice, and crime. "Society," claimed the commissioners, "would tend to be stabilized and prosperity and well-being would be encouraged."⁷ Many hoped that together these measures would foster social cohesion and make the province more attractive for investors and settlers. It is within this context that promoters of vocationalism must be viewed.

Studying the promoters of vocational education provides one avenue to help clarify the changing roles of public schooling. Vocationalism, orienting youth to their most probable destinies in the labour market, which emerged as a new school service, was only one contemporary educational innovation.⁸ Rationalizing public schools was part of a broader "thrust for efficiency" which concurrently transformed businesses, municipalities, and social services into highly centralized institutions. Social reformers drawn largely from the ranks of business, politics, and community service groups hoped that their collective responses to the social and economic unrest which surfaced in the wake of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and immigration, would bring order and stability to a community wrought by racial antagonism, severe poverty, and class conflict.⁹ It is necessary to establish who the vocational education advocates were and how they related new pedagogical ideas to their perceptions of the new social environment.

II

The purpose of vocationalism was certainly spelled out before it took root in British Columbia. In fact the association between schooling and the economy in Canada dates back to at least the mid-nineteenth century. As Canadians grew acutely aware of the needs and problems generated by social change, they also articulated the junction of vocationalism in coming to grips with these matters. Social reformers, alarmed by increasing poverty, crime, unemployment, and strikes which were caused, ironically, by the very changes they promoted, namely industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, asserted that traditional voluntary institutions for socializing youth, including the church, family, and workshop, failed to meet contemporary needs. Instead compulsory tax-supported public education offered the best means to build a stable industrial society because children could be shaped for efficient citizenship in the protective and controlled

environment of schools. If education was reshaped in conjunction with wider reforms, social and economic conflicts generated by industrial capitalism could be muted. Reformers were optimistic that progress could be fostered in what they hoped would be a stable orderly environment, and claimed that all would share in its benefits. For its part, vocational education would play a leading role in promoting social harmony by linking the schools more closely to the economy.¹⁰

From the late nineteenth century the rationale for vocational instruction began to take form, and the reasons put forth by its promoters coalesced around the new challenges of industrialization. Most central to their discussion was that vocationalism promised to enhance economic development. For example, in his 1871 annual report, Egerton Ryerson, Ontario's Chief Superintendent of Education, defined the purpose of vocationalism.

Technical education is instruction in peculiar knowledge or special skill required in any business or occupation, the training which will render the talents of the citizen most useful to the state in that particular craft or profession in which he or she is engaged, whether mechanic, farmer, engineer, teacher, merchant, architect, minister, doctor, or lawyer. As the education of the common school fits the youth for the performance of his duties as citizen, so the technical school prepares him for the special duties of his trade or profession. Divinity, law, and medical schools for special or technical instruction have long been in successful operation.¹¹

Yet a decade later the concept of vocational education became refined and no longer took on the broad meaning intimated by Ryerson. Influenced by Great Britain's 1881 Royal Commission on Technical Instruction, the federal Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital in Canada recommended in 1889 that the public school curriculum be re-arranged "with a view of making the instruction more practical." According to the report it was the "right of everyone to receive such an education as will best fit him for the proper performance of his duties, in whatever sphere he may labour." Apparently while a classical education prepared people for professions, vocational training came to mean preparing manual workers for industry. Furthermore, the commissioners stressed that technical schools increased working class prosperity and elevated their social position, thus making them "more contented and happy."¹² Quite clearly vocational education was aimed at working class youth to prepare them for their social obligations, while at the same time it helped to defuse and depoliticize class antagonisms.

By the early 1880s the central function of vocationalism was boldly spelled out as educators perceived a need to make public schooling more relevant to Canada's industrial development. In 1882, Professor Walter Smith, Principal of Boston's Conservatory School of Fine Arts, told the Council of Arts and Manufacturers of Quebec at Montreal, that Canada needed a national policy on technical education.

When the whole world is moving, the stagnant country. . . will soon find itself out of the race of progress. . . There is no profit and no honour in being the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the skilled nations. . . A manufacturer in Paris and London and Berlin is this moment competing with one of our own manufacturers in the next street, and will beat him because he is more skilled, has better workmen, has a more steady demand from a cultivated public for his goods, and can therefore afford to put more work, skill and beauty into them, than we can, or even know how to.¹³

While national economic development was clearly the most established goal of vocationalism, the common usage of the term vocational education as it applied to the public school became limited to the preparation of potential manual workers in the trades and industries, as well as the training of clerks and domestics. This new meaning and goal of vocational education also emerged in British Columbia by 1900.

III

Support for public vocational instruction in the province's schools came from service groups, business organizations, labour unions, prominent politicians, and professional educators. Community service groups were the first strong advocates of vocational instruction in British Columbia. Their concern was initially for the welfare of children and they agitated for legislation to protect youth from economic exploitation and the seamier side of urban industrial society. After 1895 provincial branches of national service organizations surfaced, including the Local Council of Women and the Young Men's Christian Association. These two groups in particular were influential in promoting domestic science and manual training in that they drew upon national experience and prominent people from the ranks of government, business, and the professions. Service clubs thought that practical education provided children with an occupational foundation, raised working class living standards, and improved the quality of workers' family life. Through their own vocational demonstration projects and by lobbying the provincial government and local school boards, voluntary community groups helped incorporate domestic science and manual training into the public schools in British Columbia between 1903 and 1905.¹⁴

Service groups continued to support vocational instruction after its initial inception into the public schools, though their rationale became explicitly self-serving. For instance the Local Council of Women's thrust for domestic science never ended with their concern for children's welfare. Victoria's Local Council told the Technical Education Commission in 1910 that there was a shortage of domestic servants because girls wanting to work sought clerical employment. "This unhappy state of things can only be altered when a thorough technical training is afforded to these girls, so that they will be able to appreciate the true dignity of labour, and as a result will be more advanced in intelligence and skill."¹⁵ Following the First World War other conservative social organizations including the Rotary Club, Canadian Club, Kiwanas, and the Victoria Reconstruction Group supported increased vocational education, stressing its claimed powers to inculcate youth with "democratic citizenship."¹⁶ This focus was not surprising in light of the widespread labour radicalism during the early post-war period. Thus, reformers perceived vocational instruction to be good insurance against social and economic decline. Good workers were apparently good citizens and vice-versa.

As the first decade of the twentieth century wore on, business and labour steadily overshadowed the role of voluntary associations. Technical education took a back seat to more pressing issues including tariffs, wages, working conditions, and job security, but it became increasingly promoted by the Canadian Manufacturers' Association (CMA) and the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) as these organizations gained strength and importance vis-a-vis the farm bloc.¹⁷ Businessmen argued that vocational education fostered industrial development by orienting youth to manual occupations, teaching them the dignity of hand labour, imparting some facility with simple tools, offering a basic literacy to enable them to read directions, and to inculcate the necessary disciplines and motivations to prepare them for the routines of rationalized production. The CMA lobbied federal and provincial governments for the establishment of vocational education programmes. "Technical and vocational education of every kind in all parts of the Dominion," it claimed, would "bring Canada quickly to the forefront of modern nations in the matter of industrial efficiency."¹⁸ The Vancouver Board of Trade and local Chambers of Commerce held similar sentiments.¹⁹

Reformers as well as business spokesmen held that people best served society through their occupations, maintaining that the three Rs were no longer adequate to prepare all youth for citizenship in a complex industrial society. They urged that the curriculum be broadened by adding vocational training in order to attract more children to schools. In 1917 Victoria's Board of Trade requested that the provincial government give the expansion of vocational training "their early consideration." Board member, J.J. Shallcross, suggested that some school subjects, most notably classics, had little value. Economic change brought on by the "march of progress" required vocational training to equip the coming generation for the industrial pursuits perceived to be demanded by the age. For students unable to attend school full time, Shallcross thought that provisions should be made so that as many as possible could receive some preparation for the industrial world. "It was. . . essential," he said, "that after the age of twelve the general school system should be so far differentiated as to give the opportunity to some amount of vocational training." Furthermore, he made it abundantly clear that industry wanted a supply of "efficient" workers to increase productivity.²⁰ A decade later the Vancouver *Province* argued that technical education also ensured youth against "blind-alley jobs."²¹ While drumming up support for a money by-law in 1927 for a new technical school, the *Province* concluded that "technical education is in line with modern progress, and if Vancouver, as an industrial city, wishes to remain in the van, it must keep step."²² To be sure, business did not want extensive public capital invested in costly trades training because having skilled workers in an industrial landscape requiring largely unskilled labour paid few dividends. Instead they sought vocational education which strengthened work norms by popularizing industrial life and providing youth with an understanding of the dignity of manual labour, and by teaching industrial work disciplines and incentives. Since most children were likely to end up in industrial occupations, business promoters thought that some vocational training might overcome the stigma attached to rough sorts of labour and guide boys' aspirations away from the white collar jobs to manual pursuits.²³

As elsewhere in Canada, public vocational education received mixed reaction from organized labour in British Columbia at the turn of the century. From the inception of vocationalism industrial unions rejected it and maintained that stand throughout the period. For them direct political and economic actions through unions and socialist parties were the best routes to better the lot of the working class. They dismissed technical education as merely a "device to increase the efficiency of the capitalist system" and therefore postpone the establishment of a socialist society.²⁴ The more conservative craft unions considered industrialization inevitable. Unlike the radical industrial unions, they never strove to replace the economic system but rather sought social reforms to ameliorate the abuses of capitalism.

In 1900 craft unions had initial reservations about manual training being introduced into the province's public schools. They feared that it might subvert the apprenticeship system, already in decline, and flood the labour market with cheap semi-skilled labour.²⁵ But by 1901, some unions joined with business to get government support for vocational education. In the same way, labour held that technical education was necessary for the country's industrial development, which in turn would provide more employment for skilled workers. Some craft unions also regarded technical education as an integral part of broader social reforms being promoted.

Contrary to business organizations, craft unions rejected simple manual training as superficial, and asserted that the practical side of learning a trade could only be mastered on the job. They did, however, support technical instruction that emphasized the "theoretical side" of industrial work, believing that it reduced hours and fostered higher wages and promotion to management positions.²⁶ For example, the Dominion TLC resolved that the federal and provincial governments should enact legislation for technical education to train youth in subjects including electrical, chemical, and civil engineering.²⁷ Also, being well aware of the deskilling of trades brought on by mechanization and segmented labour, unions in the building trades thought that technical education broadened youth's learning, providing them with a wide range of experiences which would protect them later as workers against changes in labour market demands.²⁸

Craft unions not only advocated technical instruction, they also sought some control over it because it complemented the apprenticeship system, the traditional source of their power. Labour gained a measure of control over public vocationalism by supplying schools with journeymen to act as shop teachers.²⁹ Furthermore, some unions, including the Victoria and Vancouver Sheet Metal Workers' union, cooperated with their respective school boards between 1909 and 1913, and offered evening technical classes for boys to provide theory instruction not readily learned on the job.³⁰ The Building Trades' Association even actively supported the formation of the Vancouver Apprenticeship Council which was initiated in 1926 by business groups including the General Contractors' Association and the Associated Contractors of British Columbia. During the late 1920s the Vancouver Apprenticeship Council expanded until the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. The Council's establishment with management participation, however, further eroded union control over the apprenticeship system and ultimately over the shop floor already weakened by industrialization.³¹

After 1910, vocationalism increasingly attracted the attention of federal, provincial, and municipal politicians as the thrust for industrial efficiency intensified. Their testimony, however, was often contradictory. Prior to that date the federal government was reluctant to get involved in technical education because some considered all forms of education a provincial responsibility. Prime Minister Laurier did not wish to overstep his bounds and alienate the provinces, especially in light of the aftermath of the Manitoba school question. To capital and labour, technical education was a matter of nation building, and thus fell under the federal branch of Trade and Commerce. Historian Robert Stamp insists that this dilemma was solved only because Labour Minister Mackenzie King, a strong advocate of vocationalism, was able to persuade Laurier to establish a Royal Commission to investigate this issue. In 1910 King stated that 624 coal miners had lost their lives in British Columbia since 1900 and insisted vocational training reduced industrial accidents. Furthermore, the Dominion's development required vocational education. Canadians, he claimed, could only hold their own against modern competition by "bringing their workmen up to the highest degree of efficiency," and seeing that "their industries were managed by men second to none in technical knowledge."³²

At the provincial level, British Columbia's Education Minister, Dr. Henry Esson Young, expressed interest in vocational education after his 1912 trip to England where he inspected many technical schools and concluded that they were an "absolute necessity under modern industrial and commercial conditions." Employers, he observed, were anxious to secure graduates from these schools, and

suggested "trained men command better wages and the net result of the work was to improve the conditions of the workingman and bring about a better feeling between capital and labour. . . ." ³³ A decade later the provincial government continued to promote the value of vocational education. J.D. McNiven, Deputy Minister of Labour, told the Victoria CMA that "the manufacturers should favour the movement for technical education as it will result in more skilled labour and trade workers. Instead of a boy leaving school to fill a 'blind' job he will be able to fit himself for a vocation which suits him before he leaves school." ³⁴ Yet there was no discussion on who would then fill the short term and low paying unskilled jobs, which after all dominated the labour market of the province's mining, forestry, and construction industries. ³⁵

At the municipal level, school trustees, especially in the larger urban centres, pressed for vocational instruction. Dr. Brydon-Jack, Chairman of the Vancouver School Board, lectured the Trades and Labour Council in 1913 in order to rally support for technical education. Reassuring labour that vocational instruction was not trades training, he asserted:

technical training is an education for industrial purposes. . . . The technical school is intended to broaden the knowledge of the principles of respective trades or employment, thereby tending to increase the efficiency of the workers, to shorten the hours of work, and to increase the rate of wages.

He also warned that large numbers of young people were leaving school with an incomplete training and consequently were drifting into temporary occupations that headed nowhere. ³⁶

New Westminster trustee and former provincial Chief Inspector of Machinery, John Peck, adopted a nativistic argument to gain support for a Victoria technical school in 1929. He told a public meeting that technical education addressed itself to the desirability of having the country's resources developed by "our own people, instead of having to depend upon outsiders, in cases where more or less technical knowledge is required. Such positions being filled by strangers, has been leaving all our people in more menial positions [*sic*]. . . ." ³⁷ To his credit, Victoria trustee, G.A.A. Hebden, placed vocational training more accurately into the context of industrial work. He observed the growing trend of occupational specialization and its effects on work attitudes. Certainly most industrial jobs were task oriented where large numbers of unskilled labourers performed limited and repetitious operations in a subdivided and mechanized work process. Hebden thought technical education restored traditional work values by giving "a boy a conception of the purpose of his work."

This is very necessary and is illustrated in the story of three men who were chipping rock with chisels. When asked what they were doing, one said he was 'cutting rock,' another said he 'was working for \$7.50 a day,' and the third said he was 'helping to build a cathedral.' ³⁸

Isolated in the work process workers often did not understand their part in production since they were only involved with a single aspect of the finished product. This was in contrast with pre-industrial work rhythms where individual craftsmen skillfully completed the entire product. ³⁹

Indeed the most vigorous proponents of vocational instruction in British Columbia were university professors, Education Department officials, and school teachers. Their rationale coalesced around similar overriding themes put forth by the other groups mentioned. Educators' concerns for vocationalism stemmed both from the needs and problems generated by industrialization, as well as influential educational developments in the United States and Europe.

Until 1900 vocational education was not nationally established although some classes existed in eastern Canadian schools and mechanics' institutes. In 1900 the philanthropist, Sir William Macdonald, financed manual training programmes across Canada and introduced them into British Columbia's public schools on a trial basis. James W. Robertson who administered the Macdonald movement, clarified the school/work relationship. Placing it into the broad theme of economic development, he stated:

In . . . British Columbia, with her immense underdeveloped . . . resources, the importance of manual training . . . cannot be overestimated, as it would give the boys a substantial grounding in rudimentary mechanics which would fit them. . . to approach and grasp the higher branches of a technical education.⁴⁰

He later elaborated how the objective of the 1910 Royal Commission on Technical Education and the 1909 Commission on Conservation dove-tailed in promoting industrial efficiency. Regarding Canada's resources, he noted:

these cannot be utilized to advantage unless the people be competent in the performance of intelligent, skillful labour. Intelligence and skill in labour, as factors in industrial efficiency, are promoted by some form of industrial training and technical education. The two Commissions are an expression of the nation's desire to ascertain with some measure of . . . clearness what we have in our material resources and how best and most may be made of them and of the human talent inherent in our people.⁴¹

Citing Robertson, J.W. Gibson, British Columbia's Director of Elementary Agricultural Education, reported in 1920 that school experiences should tend "more directly toward the inculcation and conservation of a love of productive, constructive, and conserving labour."⁴²

Provincial education officials asserted that vocational instruction stimulated economic expansion and stressed that programmes be vigorously extended into the high schools. In 1907 Harry Dunnell, Inspector of Manual Training, pointed to the growing prominence of manual instruction abroad and then emphasized its important contribution to youth so they could keep pace in the race for progress. "Can a young country like ours, that is constantly drawing from the older countries for its increasing population, ignore this fact? Our schools. . . cannot afford to lag behind. . . ."⁴³ Three years later while promoting technical schools, Dunnell said:

on the eve of the development of a great province, it behooves us to look about and examine ourselves, and ask. . . the question, 'Are we doing all that we possibly can to train our boys that they will be able to take up the great burden of successfully developing and building up. . . British Columbia.'⁴⁴

John Kyle was the most prominent spokesman for vocational training in the province after 1914 when he became Organizer of Technical Education. That year he championed vocational education, addressing school trustees and public bodies, writing in newspapers, and contacting "hundreds of business firms."⁴⁵ During the war he stressed the value of vocationalism for teaching youth their social obligations. Kyle argued that "the hope of the Empire depends upon the training of the rising generation in industrial efficiency and instilling noble ideas of public service in the minds of those who will be the men and women of the future."⁴⁶ Although he attracted interest from Boards of Trade and Manufacturers' Associations, their overriding concern for costs and the "government's pitiful policy of retrenchment," temporarily hampered his efforts.⁴⁷ Kyle continued to draw public attention to vocational instruction and after the war he gathered increased support as the province pulled out of the recession of the early 1920s and as the federal and provincial governments made funds available after 1919.⁴⁸ After the wartime

financial restrictions, governments expanded vocational programmes most likely in response to large scale unemployment, high inflation and labour unrest.

Teachers too supported the vocational training movement. J.G. Lister, a Vancouver shop teacher, claimed technical training provided an education for those entering industrial jobs.⁴⁹ The *B.C. Teacher*, organ of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, pointed to post-war Germany as an example of how a nation rocked by war, revolution and crisis following the Treaty of Versailles expanded vocational programmes in its school system.⁵⁰ Harry Charlesworth, General Secretary of the BCTF, informed community service groups that vocational training countered the high school's academicism which catered to only the "ten percent" who entered the professions, and argued that technical training stemmed the dropout rate and enabled youth to fill "expert" jobs.⁵¹ Influenced by eminent educationists' approval of vocationalism, the 1923 BCTF convention resolved that the Education Department make "manual training compulsory in the Senior Grades of the Public Schools of cities of the first and second class, and in the first and second years of the high schools in such cities, and in all cities, districts and municipalities where now established."⁵² Vancouver and Victoria branches of the Parent Teachers' Association also forwarded similar suggestions.⁵³

IV

Few leading educators in British Columbia during the first three decades of the twentieth century disputed that the main purpose of modern education was to produce good citizens. They could not agree, however, on the best means to promote this end. As Greater Vancouver and New Westminster became more important industrial and commercial centres and some interior communities blossomed, educators pressed for increased vocationalism, and perceived it to be more relevant than the classics to changing conditions. The Putman-Weir *Survey* vigorously supported vocational education and questioned the contribution of "foreign languages" to "social progress."

... Social progress in a democracy is dependent upon progress in public education. ... Social progress in any event is slow. ... If public educational institutions are to give it a sustained and well directed push, then educational leaders and publicists must have clearly defined ideas upon the aims of social progress and upon the underlying social, industrial and economic, and political phenomena around them which determine its momentum and direction. ... Parents say: What shall I do with my child when he leaves the kind of education he is now receiving? What is the use in educating our boys and girls for a status in life which they cannot hope to attain? Why teach our boys Latin and French when they have to become messengers, clerks, or day-labourers? Such questions on the part of parents in urban centres point unmistakably to one of two things. Either the social, economic, and industrial conditions are unhealthy, or badly balanced, or maladjusted, or the schools are not doing their full duty toward the young people who leave their doors with faces set toward the world and its work. Either thousands of people are crowding into urban centres where they are failing to achieve an economic independence in harmony with desire and personal fitness or the school aims are too much divorced from the needs of the real world about it.⁵⁴

Quoting H.G. Wells, John Kyle stated the need to "invigorate and reinvigorate education" and make it more relevant to the developing province. "We need to create a sustained counter-effort to the perpetual tendency of all educational organizations toward classicalism, secondary issues, and the evasion of life."⁵⁵

Throughout the period vocationalism did not go unchallenged as supporters of the traditional curriculum countered their critics with a spirited defence, pointing out the merits of citizenship training under their system. School Inspector J.S. Gordon claimed proponents of technical training were of the opinion that a course

of study was "practically useless" unless it supplied students with a "fund of knowledge that made the "earning of money rapidly, and at an early age a certainty." He charged that the "commercial value of a study alone" appealed to the promoters of vocationalism and suggested they lost sight of the fact that "to learn how to live" was just as important as to "learn how to earn a living."⁵⁶ Writing in the *B.C. Teacher*, Sir Arthur Currie, Principal of McGill University and World War I hero, reminded those who lashed out against a classical education that schooling was a "discipline of the mind, and that whatever produces that discipline — whether Algebra or Latin grammar, — is of great value to the boy." He hoped that people were beginning to realize how far the "eagerness for immediate profit and utility has led our reformers to disregard any general mental cultivation which cannot be interpreted in terms of material gain."⁵⁷

In addition, traditionalists blamed their opponents for many children leaving school at fourteen because criticisms of the curricula generated antipathy amongst "mentally inactive students" toward their studies. It was a "difficult task to develop the reasoning faculties of a youth," claimed one schoolman, if he had "the idea that the study" was "useless." Consequently "criticisms encouraged students. . .to drop out of school. . .to begin life's work with little knowledge and very little skill."⁵⁸ But in all likelihood most children who left school did so to work in order to help support their families.

More important, some conservative educators perceived vocationalism as a threat to a corporate society which they claimed was founded upon moral character. They maintained the function of the school was certainly not to train youth for specialized careers, although education if it was done "properly" provided the necessary preparation for work. For them, the essential service of the public school was

to train a strong, united democracy; to establish a common interest, which subsequent adherence to party or sect shall not avoid or impair, and which shall conserve for each individual his personal value and his proper liberty with a due regard to the common weal[;] nor should any teaching be admitted to shelter under the aegis of the public school which might in any way tend to weaken, or obscure this end. School methods, then, are to be brought to this test.

Are they such as to develop power of body, of mind, of character, or corporate action: Are the conditions of the school and is the mode of presentation and correlation of studies such as to impress the sense of a common interdependence and an underlying unity?⁵⁹

To these educators all classes of children should be well rounded in the principles of mutual obligation so that they might develop a sense of community and social order which would prevent class conflict.

The dangers of an overly vocational curriculum compared to the virtues of a humanistic one emerged full blown at the height of the Great War. Inspector A.C. Dove warned against denuding the curricula of language, literature, and history, and pointed to the German example of a too practical education. "It is just the absence of. . .humanizing qualities that constitutes the difference between the merely practical *kultur* of the German and the culture of the rest of the world; it is their loss that has turned the German of today into the malignant disease, the cancer of humanity." Dove saw the war as a direct "result" of a "*merely practical education.*"⁶⁰

Furthermore, critics argued that simply socializing youth with an outworn and discordant work ethic, as well as habituating them to rigid work rhythms, could not effectively counteract the miserable conditions and pejorative image of the industrial workplace. Most work in the province's expanding resource industries

was dirty, dangerous, and seasonal. Labourers quickly mastered the methodical tasks of a repetitious workschedule on the job. C.L. Gibbs of Edmonton's Technical school recognized this fact about industrial work and wrote in the *B.C. Teacher* that so long as those who

do the world's manual work are looked upon as the chips in a game of profit poker and their labour as a commodity to be bartered as men haggle over a horse deal, so long will the dignity and attraction of manual work remain a medieval legend and just so long will parents and children alike strive and struggle to avoid overalls and enter the ranks of those who do a minimum of toiling and spinning.⁶¹

Similarly, many parents and teachers believed that industrial employment did not require education or special training. Moreover, they saw manual work with its low status as undesirable and looked upon vocational courses as a suitable place for "mental defective and retarded pupils." Children too reflected this attitude and took academic classes in order to "eliminate the necessity of working with their hands or soiling their hands or soiling their clothes."⁶² Nevertheless Gibbs suggested that many parents often approved of vocational courses, but not for their children.

The parents are in favour of technical education — on general principles — yet they send their children to the academic high schools; they are in favour of industrial training and vocational education — on general principles — but when they are thinking in terms of their children's livelihood they send them to the academic high schools. Again, in spite of the much heralded failure of the academic schools to relate teaching to life, parents do seem to link themselves up to, and even jealously guard the approaches to those avenues of life which appear to the average parent most worthwhile. In spite of their proclaimed inability to qualify for the magic attribute, 'vocational,' academic schools are still the only institutions whose certificates give a practical vocational standing and prestige.⁶³

In the rural areas parents often objected to vocational education's high costs. Additionally, the status of handwork subjects was precarious since parents often held that school was a place where the child went to "study a book." The Putman-Weir *Survey* reported that for the school to attempt to teach a boy how to use tools or a girl to sew or make bread was "to put shame upon the father and mother" who were "highly accomplished along these lines."⁶⁴

To be sure, educational critics did not categorically oppose all vocational training. On the contrary, they proposed that it emphasize a cultural dimension to prepare people for consumption and leisure. Vocationalism was widely thought to be well suited to promoting peace in the community and good relations between capital and labour. Indeed, the fear of class conflict intensified after the war as the gulf separating rich and poor widened and as workers realized their degradation. Educators believed that the rift between the classes could be healed by elevating the cultural level of workers and by getting them to take on the values of the propertied. The result, they asserted, would be industrial efficiency and progress. As an illustration, Vancouver teacher Margaret Ross cogently stated:

The new education accepts the duty of training the child for his leisure as well as for work. The mechanizing of labour makes this increasingly vital. The workman of the past had at least some interest in his finished product; the workman of today spends his time at a standardized part. He is much better paid, and his work is increasingly monotonous. His leisure is greater; his training to enjoy it nil. He is easy prey of the agitator and the best available material for social upheavals. The solution of the disharmony between capital and labour lies largely in the schools. The struggle of the masses for a share in the comforts and leisure of life can be made a progressive struggle rather than a revolution if the children are introduced sympathetically to the best of the age. It is not enough to provide commercial, technical, vocational education; all children in a democracy have a right to a share in the social inheritance of the race.⁶⁵

Some schoolmen asserted that hobbies and recreation learned in vocational classes

enlarged the "human spirit." Consequently, "individual happiness," "community progress," and "industrial efficiency" were enhanced because workers returned to their "menial jobs" with "renewed energies."⁶⁶ This argument, that man was more than economic man was national in scope as W.L. Grant wrote in the *Queen's Quarterly* that "man is by nature civic" and "that the Cash Nexus is an inadequate bond for the members of the state and must be supplemented by something deeper and more spiritual. . . . If the workingman is to be a citizen, he must have leisure and must be educated to use that leisure."⁶⁷

Professor H.T.J. Coleman, Philosophy Chairman at the University of British Columbia, argued in 1929 that a broader conception of vocational instruction satisfied workers and gave them a perspective on how their specialized occupations fitted into the "larger scheme of industrial life of the community and the nation and, indeed, the world." His ideal society was one where no sharp demarcations between working and non-working hours existed, where labour and leisure blended into living.

How a man plays may be consequently just as important a question for the man himself, and for the community, as how he works. Here we have undoubtedly one of the fundamental uses of leisure. It is to restore the balance which civilized life of any sort is bound to disturb. For we must remember that not only the muscular and nervous structures of our bodies, but also the tastes and tendencies and dispositions of our minds, were all laid down during the pre-industrial period in human life — that period during which there were no time-clocks or factory whistles and no machine industry.⁶⁸

Likewise, the *B.C. Teacher*, quoting the *Christian Science Monitor*, concluded that while education for a livelihood was important, an education for "life" was "essential." "In leisure the real self is set free; it is master of its own activities, and it is these unrestrained activities which afford the true index to the personality which early education has built up." The "test" of a man's education was what he chose to do when he was "not obliged to do anything."⁶⁹

In sum, the critics of vocationalism simply rejected school training that placed the acquisition of what was called "useful of money-getting knowledge," before the development of mind and character. "We must not forget," commented Currie,

that technical education. . . should always be the sequel to a general education and never a substitute for it. . . . One of the great needs of our country today is sound, general school education not specialized to meet the requirements of a particular industry, but directed to the cultivation of valuable mental habits. . . .⁷⁰

Thus some school promoters feared that materialism and ignorance were main sources of social strife, and that vocational training neglected the stabilizing spiritual goals enhanced by the arts and sciences. They held that a general education was necessary to counteract the effects of unstimulating industrial jobs, and to elevate the respectability of the working class, not losing sight of their objective that cultivated minds contributed to social improvement. Too much vocational instruction would "starve a mental faculty" and therefore "impair the whole mind," and only a well rounded education stimulated mental development. Classical schoolmen concluded that the main object of education was to "establish character, to make moral character more efficient through knowledge, to make moral character more efficient through mental discipline."⁷¹



Despite some confusion surrounding the numerous but not unrelated aims of vocational education, the number of manual training, domestic science, and tech-

nical classes grew dramatically during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In 1900, manual training was introduced in Vancouver, Victoria, and New Westminster schools and served only a handful of students. By 1928-29 there were 14,981 students, 111 centres, and 89 teachers. Similarly, domestic science was introduced in 1903 into the major urban schools and expanded rapidly to include 12,231 students, 78 centres, and 73 teachers by 1928-29. Equally impressive was the steady growth of technical schools in the decade after the 1919 Technical Education Act. Just prior to the expiry of the federal funds from the Act the provincial government moved on January 2, 1929, to petition Ottawa to extend the Act for another ten years since British Columbia had not used its full allotment.⁷²

During thirty years of educational developments spurred by the social strain of the period, reformers tried to create an efficient school system which would equip youth for citizenship in an increasingly complex industrial society. As industrialization, urbanization, and immigration profoundly altered social relationships, public schools became more relied upon to socialize the young because traditional educational agencies were widely perceived to be inadequate. Schools were to raise the moral, social, intellectual, and economic status of a generation of children who could effectively enhance the province's progress. But how would vocational education contribute to social and economic efficiency? For its part vocationalism tried to attract more youth to school and prepare those destined to labour in industry by promoting the dignity of manual work, and habituating students to new industrial work rhythms and norms including workmanlike habits, self-discipline, time-thrift, honest work, cooperation, deference, and obedience.⁷³ In short youth were to accept faithfully their niche in the social matrix.

Yet vocationalism did not have a monopoly on teaching youth discipline-oriented values deemed so essential to citizenship. In fact they were also imparted by the regular curriculum.⁷⁴ "School discipline," argues historian Carl Kaestle, "offered something to everyone in a time of rapid change: obedient children for anxious parents, malleable students for efficient schools, productive workers for the emerging capitalist economy, and acquiescent citizens" for a developing nation.⁷⁵ Reformers lauded the virtues of school discipline for potential workers and managers alike as essential to success in later life. It did not, however, generally pay off for labourers. Despite promoters' claims about technical education providing mobility and status, honest work and self-discipline, workers were usually rewarded with meager wages and frequent unemployment. This was not surprising since industrial efficiency ultimately entailed the subordination of human considerations to those of profitability. In a competitive, market-oriented context, workers were treated as costs and employers tried to minimize expenses by keeping wages low and substituting more expensive skilled labour with cheap unskilled labour as mechanization and the division of labour made this possible. Little wonder then that the much paraded ideals of educational reforms did not ensure everyone encouraged to seek schooling, with the fruits of progress. Yet reformers' sincerity was not contradicted by the often miserable social and economic realities faced by the province's workers. Instead school promoters attributed the unpalatable side-effects of industrial capitalism to the workers' own character failures. For many ordinary working people progress remained elusive.

Notes

¹Marvin Lazerson and Timothy Dunn, "Schools and the Work Crisis: Vocationalism in Canadian Education," in *Precepts, Policy and Process: Perspectives on Contemporary Canadian Education*, Eds. H.A. Stevenson and J.D. Wilson (London: Alexander, Blake and Associates, 1977), pp 285-304.

²Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 13.

³Timothy A. Dunn, "The Rise of Mass Public Schooling in British Columbia, 1900-1929," in J.D. Wilson and D.C. Jones, eds, *Schooling and Society in Twentieth Century British Columbia* (Calgary: Detselia 1980), pp. 23-51.

⁴P.E. Roy, "The Preservation of the Peace in Vancouver: The Aftermath of the Anti-Chinese Riot of 1887," *BC Studies*, 31 (Autumn 1976): 44-59; A.R. McCormack, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia," *BC Studies*, 21 (Spring 1974): 3-27; and G. Friesen, "'Yours in Revolt': Regionalism, Socialism and the Western Canadian Labour Movement," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976): 139-57.

⁵Robertson Papers, B3, F2, University of British Columbia Special Collections (Vancouver). For a full analysis of middle class reformers, see J.K. Foster, "Education and Work in a Changing Society: British Columbia, 1879-1930," (M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1970).

⁶Canada, Parliament, *Sessional Papers, Report of the Department of Labour* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1915), p. 78, hereafter *DL*.

⁷D.L. Matters, "A Report on Health Insurance: 1919," *BC Studies*, 21 (Spring 1974): 28-32.

⁸David Jones notes that some educators in British Columbia during the period objected to the term vocationalism. "Agriculture, the Land, and Education: British Columbia, 1914-1929," (Ed. D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1978). Manual training, domestic science, industrial training, home economics, and technical training were all forms of vocational education. Manual training and domestic science were equivalent, the former being for boys, the latter for girls. It was "hand and eye" training designed to educate the "whole child," both at the elementary and secondary levels. Technical education was theory oriented and geared to industrial management training for high school students. Home economics was also for high school students and taught the theory and practice of cooking, sewing, and family management. For a detailed discussion of these terms see: M.J. Brewin, "The Establishment of an Industrial Education System in Ontario," (M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1967); and S.W. Semple, "John Seath's Concept of Vocational Education in the School System of Ontario, 1884-1911," (M. Ed. thesis, The University of Toronto, 1964). In British Columbia, however, these distinctions were seldom made and the terms were synonymous as they were often used interchangeably. The terms industrial and technical education were used frequently but trades and management training never emerged in the province's high schools. For the purpose of this article the term vocational education will include commercial training, manual training, domestic science, home economics and technical education, with the latter two being advanced versions of manual training and domestic science.

⁹Donald Avery, "Continental European Immigrant Workers in Canada 1896-1919: From 'Stalwart Peasants' to Radical Proletariat," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 12 (Winter 1973): 54-64; Ross A. McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); P. Rutherford, "Tomorrow's Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement In Canada, 1880-1920," *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers*, (1971): 203-224, and Donald Avery, *Dangerous Foreigners* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979).

¹⁰Prentice, *The School Promoters*; and Timothy A. Dunn, "Work, Class and Education: Vocationalism in British Columbia's Public Schools, 1900-1929," (M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1978).

¹¹*Vocational Education*, 28 (Aug. 1928): 1. This was a publication of the federal Department of Labour.

¹²Canada, Parliament, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital in Canada*, 2 reports and 5 volumes of evidence. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1889), report 1: 121.

¹³*Vocational Education*, 28 (Aug. 1928): 1-2.

¹⁴Vancouver School Board, Minutes, May 15, 1904; Canada, Parliament, *Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education*, 4 vols. (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1913): 4: 2329 and 2348, hereafter *RCITTE*. For a thorough discussion of the dynamics of how voluntary associations influenced vocational training in the province's public schools, see J.K. Foster, "Education and Work in a Changing Society. . ." Ch. 4.

¹⁵*RCITTE*, 4: 2348.

¹⁶*Victoria Daily Times*, Apr. 1, 1919, p. 6. See also: *Victoria Daily Colonist*, Jan. 15, 1919, p. 7; *Times*, Mar. 20, 1928, p. 1; *Times*, Feb. 1, 1929, p. 1; *Colonist*, Jan. 13, 1921, p. 4; *Colonist*, Jan. 15, 1919, p. 7;

Colonist, Oct. 22, 1920, p. 7; *Times*, Jan. 30, 1929, p. 2; and the *B.C. Teacher*, (Mar. 1923): 150, hereafter *BCT*.

¹⁷R.M. Stamp, "Technical Education, the National Policy, and Federal-Provincial Relations in Canadian Education, 1899-1919," *Canadian Historical Review*, 52 (Dec. 1971): 404-23.

¹⁸*DL*, (1910): 95-96; and the *Labour Gazette*, 13 (Oct. 1913) 645. The *Labour Gazette* is published by the federal Department of Labour.

¹⁹*Times*, Feb. 8, 1929, p. 3; and *RCITTE*, 4: 2340.

²⁰*Times*, July 14, 1917, p. 7; and *Times*, July 13, 1917, p. 11.

²¹*Vancouver Daily Province*, Jan. 26, 1926, p. 6.

²²*Province*, June 24, 1927, p. 6

²³Timothy A. Dunn, "Teaching the Meaning of Work: Vocational Education in British Columbia, 1900-1929," in *Shaping The Schools Of The Canadian West*, p. 244, Eds. D.C. Jones, N.M. Sheehan, and R.M. Stamp, (Calgary, Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1979).

²⁴Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour 1880-1930* (Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University, 1968), pp. 102-03.

²⁵*Colonist*, Aug. 26, 1900, p. 12.

²⁶Canada, Parliament, *Minutes of Evidence Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in the Province of British Columbia* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1904), p. 222; *Colonist*, Aug. 26, 1900, p. 12; and *RCITTE*, 4: 2341.

²⁷*DL*, (1910): 96.

²⁸Foster, "Education and Work in a Changing Society: British Columbia, 1879-1930," pp. 80-90.

²⁹*Federationist*, Sept. 28, 1912, p. 3; *Federationist*, Oct. 12, 1913, p. 2; and *Federationist*, Oct. 24, 1913, p. 6. Teachers on the other hand feared that half-trained artisans might flood the schools. British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Annual Reports of the Public Schools of the Province of British Columbia, 1916-17* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1917), p. 81, hereafter *AR*; *AR*, 1919-20, p. 85; and *AR*, 1923-24, p. 11 The *Federationist* was the organ of the B.C. Federation of Labour.

³⁰Foster, "Education and Work in a Changing Society. . ." Although Foster covers this ground in considerable detail, he does not place the Vancouver Apprenticeship Council into the larger context of management's growing control of the workplace.

³¹*Vocational Education*, 20 (Feb. 1929): 43-44; *AR*, 1925-26, p. 60; *Labour Gazette*, 27 (Sept. 1927): 970; and *DL*, (1927): 155.

³²*DL*, (1914): 67; and *Labour Gazette*, 10 (Jan 1910): 807.

³³Clippings from *Colonist*, Sept. 22, 1912 in the *Robertson Papers*, B6, F2. See also *Colonist*, June 4, 1918, p. 8.

³⁴*Times*, Mar. 28, 1928, p. 15.

³⁵For an analysis of the nature of employment in British Columbia, see: Dunn, "Work, Class, and Education. . ." pp. 36-72.

³⁶*Federationist*, Feb. 13, 1913, p. 1.

³⁷*Times*, Feb. 13, 1929, p. 10.

³⁸*Times*, Feb. 26, 1929, p. 5.

³⁹See: Bryan Palmer, "Most Uncommon Common Men: Craft and Culture in Historical Perspective," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976): 5-32; and E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, 38 (Dec. 1967): 56-97.

⁴⁰*Colonist*, Nov. 20, 1900, p. 2.

⁴¹*Roberston Papers*, B5, F5. Historians Cook and Brown placed the Conservation Commission into the context of the changing demands of an urban industrial society, and claimed the Commission's work "displayed the commitment of both business and government to rational, scientific methods in organizing Canadian society. Like Mackenzie King's Department of Labour, the Commission of Conservation was part of the new, efficient, expert bureaucracy that was an emerging counterpart of the

industrial society." Robert C. Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921 A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974): p. 96.

⁴²AR, 1919-20, p. 48.

⁴³AR, 1908-09, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁴AR, 1910-11, p. 39.

⁴⁵AR, 1914-15, p. 86.

⁴⁶AR, 1916-17, p. 79.

⁴⁷AR, 1914-15, p. 86; and *Colonist*, Feb. 6, 1918, p. 7.

⁴⁸AR, 1918-19, p. 81; and AR, 1919-20, p. 85.

⁴⁹*The Educator of Canada*, 1 (June 1919): 1. Organ of the BCTF.

⁵⁰*BC Teacher*, (Nov. 1922): 72.

⁵¹*Colonist*, Jan. 13, 1921, p. 4; and *Times*, May 6, 1921, p. 3.

⁵²*B.C. Teacher*, (Apr. 1923): 189.

⁵³*Province*, Apr. 5, 1928, p. 6; and *Colonist*, Feb. 23, 1928, p. 5.

⁵⁴J.H. Putman and G.M. Weir, *Survey of the School System* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1925), pp. 83-84.

⁵⁵AR, 1924-25, p. 59.

⁵⁶AR, 1910-11, p. 27.

⁵⁷*B.C. Teacher*, (Mar. 1923): 152.

⁵⁸AR, 1910-11, p. 27.

⁵⁹AR, 1915-16, p. 40.

⁶⁰AR, 1917-18, pp. 31-32.

⁶¹*B.C. Teacher*, (Sept. 1929): 7.

⁶²DL, (1926): 72.

⁶³*B.C. Teacher*, (Sept. 1929): p. 8.

⁶⁴Putman and Weir, *Survey of the School System*, p. 96.

⁶⁵Margaret Ross, "The New Conception of Education," *The British Columbia Monthly*, 14 (Nov. 1918): 20.

⁶⁶*B.C. Teacher*, (Jan. 1931): 37. See also: *B.C. Teacher*, (May 1929): 13-17; *B.C. Teacher*, (Sept. 1929): 9-10; *B.C. Teacher*, (Feb. 1923):137; and H.T.J. Coleman, "Training For The New Citizenship," *Queen's Quarterly*, 2 (July 1919): 12-21.

⁶⁷W.L. Grant, "The Education of the Workingman," *Queen's Quarterly*, 27 (Oct. 1919): 159-167.

⁶⁸*B.C. Teacher*, (May 1929): 16-17. See Thompson's, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," for a full development of this theme.

⁶⁹*B.C. Teacher*, (Feb. 1923): 137.

⁷⁰*B.C. Teacher*, (March 1923): 51-52.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Dunn, "Work, Class and Education: Vocationalism in British Columbia's Public Schools, 1900-1929," p. 216; *Times*, Mar. 16, 1929 and *Labour Gazette*, 29 (June 1929): 610.

⁷³Dunn, "Teaching the Meaning of Work: Vocational Education in British Columbia, 1900-1929," pp. 236-256.

⁷⁴Dunn, "The Rise of Mass Public Schooling in British Columbia, 1900-1929."

⁷⁵Carl F. Kaestle, "Social Change, Discipline, and the Common School in Early Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 9 (Summer 1978): 16.