

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF EDUCATION

BULLETIN, 1919, No. 18

COMMERCIAL EDUCATION

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[Advance sheets from Biennial Survey of Education
in the United States, 1916-1918]



WASHINGTON
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
1919

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COMMERCIAL EDUCATION.

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The influence of industrial vocational education is having its effect upon practices and methods of commercial education. The practice of industrial education of analyzing a curriculum of subjects containing values of vocational work, related vocational, and non-vocational subjects is causing us to examine commercial education with a view to a more careful practice with respect to like items. We are accustomed to note a large proportion of our high-school pupils as pursuing commercial education. More strictly speaking, however, commercial pupils in our high schools are those pursuing general academic education with one or two commercial subjects, usually of clerical character. There has been little related commercial work required of our so-called commercial pupils and the nonvocational or general academic subjects have been taught with complete disregard for the special needs of commercial pupils. A review of the historical development of commercial education easily explains the present situation.

In the early days before the period of vocational education, no provision was made in educational curriculums for the training of boys and girls for office work or other commercial occupations. The private business school was first to see the need of a new training and to effect an organization to meet this need. These institutions offered short intensive courses in bookkeeping and later in typewriting and shorthand. The history of the private commercial school is well known. This type of school rendered a real service at a time when the public-school authorities were either ignorant of the need or unwilling to meet it. The original commercial courses in public high schools were short intensive courses. This kind of organization immediately called down upon commercial educators severe criticism from those who were charged with the responsibility of administering public education, and from the public in general which was at that time quick to reflect the idealism and aloofness

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from life character of all educational enterprise. The natural result of this widespread criticism was to shake the faith of the commercial teachers in the type of training which they had received—that is, private commercial school training—and were recommending for the public school. It was not long before these teachers of commercial subjects began to play up to the academic standard so esteemed in the new educational fields in which they were workers, with the ultimate result that in the average high school commercial education simply represented a number of commercial elective subjects grouped with academic electives and distributed throughout the four-year program.

Under the average conditions of high schools a few of these commercial subjects could be taken, and under the most favorable conditions many such subjects could be elected. It can be seen readily that this elective plan could effect no standard of commercial instruction, and as a result the product ranged all the way from reasonably efficient to wholly inefficient. Commercial pupils under this plan lacked the thoroughness and attention which vocational pupils in more modern vocational courses attain. By the compromise described commercial educators succeeded in winning a place among educators in general, and were able to advance the cause of commercial education in a system not attempting any other kind of vocational work.

In a subsequent period of educational development two years of commercial work were offered at the end of the high-school course. Only those who were able to continue through the four-year program were permitted to get commercial training. The result of this type of commercial course was that the large majority of boys and girls who had any claim on public commercial education were denied the privilege of getting it. The private commercial school waxed fat on this public-school program.

The evolution of commercial education seems to be bringing us at this moment to a new and better conception of proper procedure. We are now attempting to meet the needs of boys and girls who attend high school in large numbers for the first two years, and who desire instruction in commercial subjects, by placing commercial work at the beginning of the course, but adapting this work to the stage of maturity of the younger pupils. The more technical and difficult commercial subjects are postponed to the latter part of the high-school course. Such a plan seems to meet more adequately the needs of all the pupils who resort to our high schools looking for the advantages possible under the limitations of time, capacity, and maturity.

Our first-year high-school commercial work consists mainly of commercial arithmetic, penmanship, and elementary bookkeeping. In our second-year work are found more advanced bookkeeping,

typewriting, and simple office procedure. Stenography and still more advanced bookkeeping are reserved for the third and fourth years. In junior high schools commercial subjects are generally taught upon a prevocational basis. Many junior high schools in their efforts to furnish fullest opportunity for those pupils who will not proceed to the senior high school are offering somewhat technical and advanced courses in stenography and bookkeeping, too advanced for the pupils who pursue the courses.

To summarize the present stage of development of commercial education in our public high schools, it may be said that the present is a period of earnest and rapid readjustment. Mistakes and failures of the past are recognized, and earnest effort is made both to make the courses suitable to the ages and capacities of pupils and for the purpose of making most valuable the opportunities for commercial instruction for all pupils, irrespective of their educational limitations and vocational destinies.

One of the most hopeful signs of a more adequate conception of the province of commercial education is the recognition that there are many commercial occupations other than those of bookkeeper and stenographer; that no boy or girl should be encouraged to apply for, or to accept, any position for which he or she is not qualified by maturity, general education, and special training; that the special aptitudes of boys and girls should be taken into consideration in determining the kind of position for which each one should be trained, and that new types of commercial education must be developed to meet newly discovered needs in the field of business training.

As an illustration of the recognition of commercial occupations other than clerical may be mentioned the subject of retail selling. In no field of commercial education is there greater activity or need for educational facilities than in that of retail selling and retail store service. In the immediate future plans for meeting this need should be developed. This attempt will mean the development of a new department of business education, with specially qualified teachers and with methods of procedure specifically adapted to secure the ends sought.

At the present time many cities are experimenting with courses in salesmanship, or, better named, retail selling. It would appear that the procedure of industrial vocational education had more in the way of suggestion for courses in retail selling than have our older courses in clerical practice. We have seen that our long-established commercial education has followed the academic procedure of the high school in teaching commercial subjects without field practice. Those best qualified to judge consider that salesmanship can not be effectively taught from textbooks alone unaccompanied by actual practice under supervised conditions. We can not expect that salesmanship can

develop as rapidly and with the same facility that clerical commercial education has shown.

During the conditions of war and the stimulation of the labor market, the need for clerically-trained commercial workers has been more apparent than that of other commercial occupations. The wages offered for clerical workers has grown with the unusual demand. This condition may be expected to retard for the present the development of the teaching of salesmanship. Even under normal conditions the teaching of salesmanship has been involved in the social prejudice which seems widespread, namely, that the commercial employment of selling goods does not equal (in the minds of pupils and parents at least) the social grade that clerical workers enjoy. Particularly with girls the vocational motive is as apt to be found in social esteem as in the wage offered. Employers of labor seeking trained sales people will need to do much in the way of affecting public opinion concerning the worth and dignity of the sales person before our pupils in public schools may be expected to elect training in salesmanship in preference to the present esteemed clerical occupation. Various investigations such as Cleveland and Minneapolis have shown that selling is more seasonal in character than in clerical work. However, any analysis of the process of selling will show that it is an art for which training may be offered as truly as that of clerical occupation, but as long as there is keen competition both in wages and in social esteem among various commercial occupations, we may expect that boys and girls will still resort in greater numbers to the long established and tried clerical occupations.

FEDERAL BOARD FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION.

PROVISION FOR COMMERCIAL EDUCATION.

Among the several assistant directors for various types of vocational education is found provision for a specialist in commercial education. F. G. Nichols, formerly director of commercial education in the city of Rochester, N. Y., has been appointed to carry on this function. Commercial education may expect from a new national source advice, guidance, and assistance, limited heretofore in this country. It is expected that a State supervisor of commercial education will be appointed in each State; such a supervisor to be accountable to the assistant director of commercial education on the staff of the Federal Board for Vocational Education in Washington.

We may expect that the character of teachers' qualifications may be formulated as the result of the new organization of forces. A better training for commercial teachers would seem probable both as the result of stimulation and advice of the national director, and also from the possibility of national funds, which seem possible under

the Smith-Hughes law. We are informed that certain kinds of commercial work where the vocational conditions are assured may receive the same subvention that does industrial vocational work. For example, commercial pupils who take cooperative courses and work at intervals in the school and in the vocation under conditions of approval as to the character of the course may constitute a group for which national moneys can be granted. Courses in salesmanship, such as those maintained in Boston and Cleveland, may petition and likely receive the same proportion of national funds for such kinds of commercial education as do courses in improved industrial education.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS EDUCATION.

COMMISSION ON THE REORGANIZATION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION.

In 1903 the National Education Association issued a brief report on commercial education, the chief feature of which was a recommendation of a commercial curriculum for general high schools. Since that date the association has offered no formal statement upon the subject of commercial education.

Two years ago a committee consisting of Dr. Cheesman A. Herrick, president of Girard College, Philadelphia; F. G. Nichols, formerly director of commercial education, Rochester, N. Y., now assistant director of commercial education, Federal Board for Vocational Education; and F. V. Thompson, superintendent of schools, Boston, formulated a report now under revision by the reviewing committee on the Reorganization of Secondary Education of the National Education Association.

The report emanating from this committee can not fail to receive marked attention, due to the keen interest in the question of readjustment of commercial education now dominant in the minds of our administrators of secondary schools.

No one who is familiar with the pronouncement of the National Education Association, in 1903, regarding the course of study can fail to see the progress and expansion of commercial education when comparing the single inflexible, largely academic course of 1903 with the manifold flexible courses formulated at the present time. As an illustration of the modern development of commercial courses of study, the commercial curriculum for cosmopolitan high schools, adopted by Boston in 1917, is offered below. It will be noted that the commercial curriculum is divided into three distinct sections in the third and fourth years of the course. Commercial pupils by such a curriculum can specialize either for the accounting or bookkeeping side of commercial occupations, or for the stenographic, or for the vocation of selling.

BIENNIAL SURVEY OF EDUCATION, 1916-1918.

COMMERCIAL CURRICULA.

(To meet all requirements for commercial certificate.)

FIRST YEAR.

Required subjects.		Elective subjects.	
	Points.		Points.
Physical training I.....	2	History I.....	3 or 5
Choral practice.....	1	Foreign language I.....	5
Hygiene.....	1	Biology I.....	3 or 4
English I.....	5	Introductory science.....	3
Bookkeeping I.....	4 or 5	Drawing I (freehand).....	3
		Domestic art I.....	3

SECOND YEAR.

Required subjects.		Elective subjects.	
	Points.		Points.
Physical training II.....	2	Choral practice II.....	1
English II.....	4 or 5	History of commerce.....	3
Bookkeeping II.....	4 or 5	Foreign language II.....	4 or 5
Commercial geography.....	3	Mathematics I.....	5
		Biology II.....	3 or 4
		Drawing II (freehand).....	3
		Domestic art II.....	3

THIRD YEAR.

NOTE.—At least one elective in the third and fourth year must be a "Controlled Option" (a related vocational subject taught in a homogeneous division).

Accounting.

Required subjects.		Points.
Physical training III.....	2	
English III.....	3 or 4	
Bookkeeping III.....	4 or 5	

Elective subjects.

Choral practice III.....	1
Phonography I.....	5
Typewriting I.....	3
Merchandising I.....	4 or 5
Civics.....	3
History III.....	3, 4, or 5
Foreign language III.....	4 or 5
Physics I.....	3, 4, or 5
Chemistry I.....	3, 4, or 5
Drawing III.....	3
Domestic art III.....	3

Secretarial.

Required subjects.		Points.
Physical training III.....	2	
English III.....	3 or 4	
Phonography I.....	5	
Typewriting I.....	3	

Elective subjects.

Choral practice III.....	1
Bookkeeping III.....	4 or 5
Merchandising I.....	4 or 5
Civics.....	3
History III.....	3, 4, or 5
Foreign language III.....	4 or 5
Physics I.....	3, 4, or 5
Chemistry I.....	3, 4, or 5
Drawing III.....	3
Domestic art III.....	3

Merchandising. (Retail selling.)

Required subjects.		Points.
Physical training III.....	2	
English III.....	3 or 4	
Merchandising I.....	4 or 5	

Elective subjects.

Choral practice III.....	1
Phonography I.....	5
Typewriting I.....	3
Bookkeeping III.....	4 or 5

Elective subjects.		Points.
Civics.....	3	
History III.....	3, 4, or 5	
Foreign language III.....	4 or 5	
Physics I.....	3, 4, or 5	
Chemistry I.....	3, 4, or 5	
Drawing III.....	3	
Domestic art III.....	3	

COMMERCIAL EDUCATION.

FOURTH YEAR.

<i>Accounting.</i>		<i>Secretarial.</i>	
Required subjects.	Points.	Required subjects.	Points.
Physical training IV.....	2	Physical training IV.....	2
English IV.....	3, 4, or 5	English IV.....	3, 4 or 5
Commercial law ¹	3	Phonography II.....	5
Bookkeeping IV.....	4 or 5	Typewriting II.....	3
Office practice.....	2 or 3		
Elective subjects.		Elective subjects.	
Choral practice IV.....	1	Choral practice IV.....	1
Phonography II.....	5	Commercial law ¹	3
Typewriting II.....	3	Bookkeeping IV.....	4 or 5
Merchandising II.....	4 or 5	Office practice.....	2 or 3
Economics ¹	3 or 4	Merchandising II.....	4 or 5
Foreign language IV.....	4 or 5	Economics ¹	3 or 4
History IV.....	4 or 5	Foreign language IV.....	4 or 5
Civil service.....	3	History IV.....	3
Drawing IV.....	3	Civil service.....	3
Domestic art IV.....	3	Drawing IV.....	3
		Domestic art IV.....	3
<i>Merchandising.</i>		<i>(Retail selling.)</i>	
Required subjects.	Points.	Elective subjects.	Points.
Physical training IV.....	2	Phonography IV.....	5
English IV.....	3, 4, or 5	Typewriting IV.....	3
Merchandising II.....	4 or 5	Economics ¹	3 or 4
Elective subjects.		Foreign language IV.....	4 or 5
Choral practice IV.....	1	History IV.....	4 or 5
Commercial law ¹	3	Civil service.....	3
Bookkeeping IV.....	4 or 5	Drawing IV.....	3
Office practice.....	2 or 3	Domestic art IV.....	4

COMMERCIAL COURSE CERTIFICATES.

A candidate for a commercial certificate must have completed a full course of training in at least one of the three vocational groups—i. e., accounting, secretarial or merchandising, with a grade not less than B in any subject of the group.

SCHOOL SURVEYS AND COMMERCIAL EDUCATION.

Since the last report of the Commissioner of Education on commercial education, a number of surveys have been made, notable among them being those of Cleveland, Minneapolis, and Indianapolis. In general, these surveys bear out the position of the Commissioner of Education's Report of 1915-16. As an instance of this, the survey in Cleveland draws a parallel between the actual commercial vocations found in that city and the public provisions for training workers in commercial occupations in the public high schools of the city. The situation depicted contains no surprises for those who are familiar with what was revealed in New York City by the Hauss inquiry of 1912.

¹ In schools requiring both commercial law and economics, the former may be taken in the third year.

Briefly stated, the Cleveland survey shows what any survey invariably does—that commercial education in our public high schools pursues a policy quite independent of the business needs and conditions of the community under consideration. Commercial education has been a thing of school credits and academic standards conducted in accordance with college entrance requirements or with abstract scholastic procedure. Commercial educators have neither seen nor apparently cared for the actual conditions of employment into which their graduates may go. The school prepares a certain product which business must take or leave just as it chooses. The Cleveland survey makes a distinct point of the fact that boys and girls are trained alike for the same kinds of commercial occupations, whereas an actual survey of business conditions shows that the sex conditions of employment are quite different, males being found in excess in certain commercial employments and females in other kinds of commercial employment.

Another pertinent criticism of the Cleveland survey is to the effect that commercial employments are taught simultaneously to the same pupils; that is, our public high schools train our boys and girls to be both good bookkeepers and good stenographers, whereas business employment shows that the demand is for specialized workers in one field or the other. Figures pertinent to this point are as follows: In Cleveland, in large business concerns, it was found that the dual capacity of stenographer and bookkeeper was found in one instance in a thousand; in small businesses only in sixty instances to a thousand.

The findings of this survey, as well as the findings in other like surveys, illustrate beyond dispute that commercial education in our public high schools has followed wholly the traditions of the school and has been oblivious to the field conditions of the vocation. There is a growing body of evidence, however, that there is a willingness to change our procedure. We may expect within the next five years to see sweeping and radical changes characterize commercial courses in our high schools.

CONCLUSION.

In general, the better type of four-year commercial course will continue to fulfill a real need and should be encouraged. The short-unit course will be found in part-time, extension, and preparatory day-school courses for boys and girls already employed. Evening school commercial work should be put on a practical and vocational basis, having in mind definite needs of definite groups of people; foreign-trade courses, in centers where such courses should be encouraged, should be organized and given wide publicity; retail-selling education of a high character, both in connection with the four-year commercial course and the part-time evening school classes, should

be made available; more intelligent rules for the licensing of teachers should be worked out; adequate commercial teacher-training facilities that will insure the training of commercial teachers along the newer lines of commercial vocational education should be set up in every State; and the whole field of commercial education should be reorganized where necessary on the basis of vocational needs, individual aptitudes, and local requirements.