

November 2019

## Quality Education and Quality Employment

Charles M. Jochem

*Superintendent Marie H. Kotzenbach School for the Deaf West Trenton. New Jersey*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara>

---

### Recommended Citation

Jochem, C. M. (2019). Quality Education and Quality Employment. *JADARA*, 3(5). Retrieved from <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara/vol3/iss5/13>

## QUALITY EDUCATION AND QUALITY EMPLOYMENT

**CHARLES M. JOCHEM**

Superintendent

Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf  
West Trenton, New Jersey

Much has been said and written about the current and long range employment and underemployment problems of the deaf. Are not the very same conditions as set forth by Dr. Lofquist in the area of general employment similar to those encountered by the deaf? Of course they are, but some of the more specific problems and changing conditions seem to threaten the deaf worker to a greater degree. Some of the most drastic changes in business and industry are in the job areas in which many deaf people have been very consistently and profitably employed. We must be aware of these regional and national trends, but let us be careful how we interpret them as they affect workers who are deaf. These trends may not be as ominous as they seem.

As we move into new areas of training and employment, let us also carefully evaluate the "old" before we abandon them. There will be a diminishing demand for certain types of workers, but we must take a long range view of each situation as it affects the deaf worker.

Many vocational schools for hearing students have long ago discontinued training for some of these "old" jobs, but for a long time to come, there will continue to be a limited demand for such skills. Since we are dealing with a very small percentage of the total labor force, perhaps we should continue to train some of our people to meet these limited demands. Attention to these job areas is rampant with possibilities for the present and the future.

Let me briefly relate only two of many examples. About eight years ago at a nationwide meeting of business education teachers, an automation expert said, "Stop training your girls in key-punch operation, for in two years this machine will be obsolete." It is times like these when I personally have a very sudden hearing loss, for I went back to school and within a few weeks tripled the number of our machines. To this day, we have had considerably more requests for operators than we can fill.

As another example, thirty years ago every vocational school in New Jersey trained hundreds of power sewing machine operators. Our school was one of these. As vocational schools for hearing students became more selective, they moved up into the more sophisticated and technical trades, leaving the power machine field entirely to us. We stayed with it. Although automation has reduced the demand somewhat, we cannot fill the current demands for operators.

Every director of a school for deaf students is in a very unique position to know what an employer desires in an employee, for all of us have the same problems of staffing. We, too, are looking for the best people we can possibly obtain to run our schools. We are looking for the same things that business and industry wants—perhaps in varying degrees, but basically the same. Each staff position is different; consequently job requirements will vary. But many of the most important qualifications are part of all jobs.

Perhaps we as employers should ask ourselves a very pertinent question: Would I hire a deaf person if he applied to me for employment? Of course I would, providing, however, he appeared to be the most qualified applicant for the job. I have a number of deaf people on my staff, every one of whom I hired because he met the qualifications of the job. I would not hire a deaf person just because he was deaf, nor do I expect business and industry to do this. Nor do deaf people themselves want to trade on their handicap.

Always keep in mind that, first, deaf people are people who happen to be deaf. However, business and industry, at times, look upon them as a different kind of people and are hesitant about employing them. That first placement is a most important one for both the employer and the deaf person since there is a tendency on the part of employers to judge "all the deaf" by their first experience. Is this unfair? Of course, but it is done. Therefore our placement people should be careful when they are asking a business to hire its first deaf employee. A proper placement of a good deaf worker has never failed to open up future jobs.

We cannot discuss the employment of the deaf without giving thought to their education and training—which is indeed a prerequisite to satisfactory employment. We must use every means at our disposal to develop our young deaf students into the kind of people industry and business want. Their requirements will include good personal work habits and attitudes, the ability to relate to others, and acceptable work skills.

Any of us who have worked in the placement process, know what a joy it is to place a person who has all these fine

attributes and fits the specifications of the job. How about the rest? Especially those at the low end of the normal curve? Placing these people in suitable jobs will tax every resource at our disposal, but their proper placement will give back great satisfaction to all involved.

Difficult or unsatisfactory placement, in many cases, is a result both of poor counseling and of improper or incomplete training and education. In the past ten years there has been a feverish effort in our schools for the deaf to improve and expand the vocational programs. This renewed interest, concern, and determination has been aimed at better meeting the educational needs of non-college bound students. Vocational education, therefore, is faced with its greatest challenge as well as its greatest opportunity since its inception. Schools for the deaf were among the pioneers in this important area of education, but we now lag pitifully far behind our hearing counterparts in this very area. Under the Vocational Education Act of 1963 we have a second chance to redeem ourselves. Whether we take advantage of this opportunity will depend very much upon the leadership we have and can develop in our own professional circles.

The question which is being given so much emphasis in our schools for the deaf seems to be "Shall we or shall we not offer quality programs of vocational education to meet the varied needs of the particular girls and boys with whom we work?" To me, this is not the basic question. The basic question is really, "Do we firmly believe that public education is for all the children of all the people?" Vocational education should not be regarded as a substitute for a sound academic background, but as an integrated part of a well rounded education. As we well know, youth vary widely in their abilities, interests and vocational goals. They also differ greatly in personality, emotional stability, family and home backgrounds, and in physical and mental health. Recognition of these individual differences has led to the need for a very flexible and diversified program in our schools.

One of the elements in nearly everyone's list of desirable educational goals is preparation for earning a livelihood. Few argue against learning saleable skills, although some would put it off almost indefinitely. The question again is not whether "learning for earning" is desirable, but "When?", "How?," and "Under whose auspices and controls?"

Certainly all education has vocational implications, but only certain types of courses and curricula are especially designed and taught to prepare young people for entry into a chosen trade or occupation upon leaving school. We also know that there are many patterns of educational organization which can provide these opportunities.

**QUALITY EDUCATION AND QUALITY EMPLOYMENT**

Where do we start in our efforts to provide the type of training and education which approximately 75% to 90% of our deaf students need if they are to be self-supporting, well adjusted, happy and successful members of our society? First, we have to take an honest and thorough look at what we have been and are doing in our schools and the place to start is, of course, at the top—the administrative structure which is the framework of any organization. We must have professionally capable staff leaders in charge of all our major school areas of training and education and we must give them all the support possible, our confidence and our help in their leadership, as well as the authority necessary for them to properly fulfill their responsibilities. Our school administrators must surround themselves with the kind of people who can do the kind of things that must be done, and then do everything possible to allow them to do these things. In our vocational area I would insist that the administrative level be that of a principal who is vocationally trained and experienced in order to insure the professional status of both the person and the program, and to assure him the authority to function creatively.

Helping these department heads to obtain and retain a competent staff is a real challenge for any school superintendent. In reality, all vocational instructors should be well trained in their trades, have at least eight years of successful employment, and, of course, have the potential for becoming successful and effective teachers. They should be state certified as teachers and should be the kind of person we would want as examples for our girls and boys. These teachers, regardless of the subject area, should keep in very close contact with their trade and, if possible, work in that trade during the summer recess. No education program is better than the capacity of the teacher.

In addition to improving administration and staffing, we must be creative, imaginative and forceful in improving and expanding our instructional procedures and services. We must know how industry operates and instruct our students accordingly. The vocational area is one of the weakest segments of our instructional program and because of this we are often criticized by those who are working in the trades. We must improve our standards and do things industry's way. This means offering specialized academic programs within the vocational departments which will meet the specific needs of each student and each trade. Vocational students need the very best academic foundation possible; this should include a dynamic vocational science course to give them a better understanding of materials and processes used in industry. The students' need for a sound academic foundation will be-

come more and more necessary as our industries and trades become more technical. Therefore, vocationally trained instructors should teach all these vocationally related academic subjects. We must also provide better foundations in work habits, attitudes, and on-the-job behavior. A good course in vocational civics might well be included in our expanded program.

In many cases, employers hire a skilled deaf person in preference to an unskilled hearing person. We must offer a wide variety of trades and occupations to serve the individual needs of every student and provide him with these trades skills. The total program should include a work-study structure for the students who would benefit from it, services of related agencies and extension of our academic program for the more able students who do not plan to go to college.

We must also face the reality that deaf adults, like hearing adults, may have to be retrained two or more times during their work life due to the rapid change in industry and business. We must use vision and imagination, combined with knowledge of industrial plants and businesses in our areas to discover every possible opportunity for updating the training for new jobs. We must develop research, experimental and pilot projects in areas best suited to the employment of the deaf. This should be coupled with more adequate physical facilities which make possible the space, equipment, and materials needed for teaching modern skills and developing modern methods of instruction. Evaluations are necessary to upgrade certain programs in suitable technical areas for our more talented young people, and to downgrade selected programs to meet the needs of the more limited students. The major portion of our program would, of course, be geared to the majority of our young people. We must also offer programs for the mental, physical, recreational, social, home-making, and spiritual needs of our young people so that they may be better prepared to live well-rounded lives as wage earners, homemakers, and members of their communities.

Let's go back to the questions of "when," "how," and "under whose auspice and control," we can develop vocational programs. We must, therefore, develop two phases: One for the present, and one for the future.

I would like to suggest some possibilities that we can pursue at once. Among our schools we have some rich resources which could be better utilized for the benefit of more students. We could carefully select and continue the present programs which are efficiently producing youth who get jobs and make progress in the trades for which they were trained. Vocational resources of schools in regional geogra-

phic areas might then be pooled eliminating any unnecessary duplications, and new trades, and occupations suitable to the students could be developed. This could readily be done in states having more than one school. The best situated and best able school could become the state center for all children of all the schools for all education beyond either the eighth grade or the age of sixteen. As an alternative, in the early stages of transition each school could improve its strongest trade courses and share these with the students of the other schools. For example, if three neighboring schools each offered six good quality trade courses, the students in these three schools would have immediately available a choice of eighteen different trades. Administrative problems could be solved by unselfish, determined effort and cooperation.

The long range plan of development could evolve from study and research, and the area residential vocational and technical school for the deaf would emerge in the finest sense of the concept. The vocational education of our young people is the duty and responsibility of our schools and, under no conditions, should we relinquish administrative control to anyone unless we are proved incapable of this assignment.

In closing may I quote Dr. Robert Worthington, Assistant Commissioner of Education in charge of Vocational Technical Education in the State of New Jersey, who has in many ways manifested his sincere interest in the deaf.

“Vocational education must be improved and expanded to eliminate the inexcusable human waste of thousands of people who do not have the skills to fill available jobs. It is clear that greater employment opportunities and a work force more capable of making use of such opportunities are among the primary domestic needs of this nation.”

And, may I add—one of the greatest needs of the deaf. I, too, firmly believe in the philosophy of educating all of our girls and boys to their highest potential, as well as in the right of every deaf child to have equality of educational resources and employment opportunities.