

100
YEAR

Celebration of CAREER GUIDANCE & EDUCATION

PARSONS' WORK & INFLUENCE

Introduction

In 1908 Frank Parsons, now widely considered the founding father of Vocational Psychology and Guidance, set the course for career guidance and education for the next 100 years by establishing the very first career counseling practice and originating the main principles of career choice. While he was not the first practitioner to consider the value of, and need for vocational guidance, Parsons was the first to formulate his ideas and put them into a comprehensive framework for successful practice, and subsequently guide other professionals to recognize and follow his lead in vocational guidance.

100 years later, the beginnings of career guidance and education will be commemorated with a year's worth of celebratory events recognizing Parsons' work and the impact and importance of vocational guidance (now career counseling) and education (now career and technical education) today.

Parsons' Work & Influence

Frank Parsons was born in 1854 and entered Cornell University before turning 16. With a degree in mathematics and engineering, Parsons worked as an engineer for a railroad company until it failed in a financial panic. Subsequently, Parsons found work as a teacher in Massachusetts and studied to become a lawyer, passing the bar examination in 1881.

To cement his role in establishing the vocational guidance movement, Parsons opened the Vocation Bureau of Boston, the first career counseling practice. As Director and Counselor for the Bureau, Parsons, joined by associate counselors Ralph Albertson, Philip Davis, and Lucinda Price, helped clients make sound career choices. The Bureau issued the following announcement of its services.

TO YOUNG PEOPLE STUDENTS AND OTHERS CONSIDERING THE QUESTION OF THEIR LIFE WORK

The wise selection of the business, profession, trade, or occupation, to which you are to devote yourself, and the building of a successful career in your chosen vocation, are matters of great moment to you and to the public. These vital problems should be solved in a careful, scientific way, with due regard to your aptitudes, abilities, ambitions, resources, and limitations, and the relations of these elements to the conditions of success in different industries. Definite knowledge of yourself and of the opportunities, requirements, compensation, immediate and prospective, etc., in various callings, is essential. Systematic information as to the best means of preparation within your reach, and the methods by which others have succeeded, is also most desirable.

This Bureau was established to help you in all these matters by counsel, guidance, information, and cooperation. Its services are free.

Many have already been greatly helped in the ways suggested – helped to find their true vocation, – the business or occupation to which their abilities and resources best adapt them, and to find an opening in that vocation and the means of attaining efficiency and success; and the experience of each of these young men and women helps to light the way for others.

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The guidance given in school days generally ceases when the students leaves the grammar school or high school or college to begin work. Yet there is really no time of life when wise counsel and expert assistance are more needful than in the transition from school to new life of labor.

No one would think of building a dwelling or a business block without carefully selecting an appropriate and advantageous site and drawing a well-considered plan with the help of an architect or expert builder. And in building a career it is quite as important to make a wise location, lay the foundation properly, and work up by a well-considered, scientific plan.

It is better to sail with compass and chart than to drift into an occupation haphazard or by change, proximity, or uninformed selection; and drift on through it without reaching any port worthy of voyage.

Excerpt from Frank Parsons, *Choosing a Career*, 1909.

Another innovation of the Vocation Bureau was to introduce vocational counseling to other practitioners and counselors, ultimately paving the way for counselor education and training in schools and universities. After establishing a class to train counselors at the Bureau, the concept was quickly launched in the Boston Public Schools. Similar bureaus were organized many cities, including Des Moines, San Jose, Chicago, Denver, Pittsburg, and Atlanta.

As the training and education of counselors spread across the country, the need for a national conference emerged and in 1913 the National Vocational Guidance Association (now the National Career Development Association) was organized.

Although Parsons died before the Bureau completed its first year of practice, his legacy was preserved in his 1909 book, "Choosing a Vocation", compiled from his papers. In the book, three main principles for career choice, which continue to be valid today, were articulated:

1. A clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations, and their causes
2. A knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects of different lines of work.
3. True reasoning on the relation of the first two principles

Parsons also took the position that counselors should not tell clients what occupation to pursue, but rather help them make positive education and vocational decisions for themselves.

Frank Parsons' principles are widely considered the outline for quality career development today as career assessment, planning, and information systems such as the Kuder Career Planning System (www.kuder.com) incorporate these principles into the logic and processes outlined within the system. His work and influence demonstrated his commitment to social change and left a legacy for vocational counseling and counseling professionals that should be celebrated.

Other Significant Milestones

Thanks to the great beginnings started by Parsons, career guidance and education plays an important role in today's educational, workforce, and governments systems. Over the last 100 years, there have been many advances and milestones which have shaped career guidance and education:

- 1910:** David Snedden, Commissioner of Education for Massachusetts set the context for vocational education by dividing "education" into three areas: Physical Education, Vocational Education, and Liberal Education. He further defined Vocational Education by segmenting it into Professional Education, Commercial Education, Industrial Education, Agricultural Education, and Household Arts Education.
- 1913:** National Vocational Guidance Association (now the National Career Development Association, 1985) was organized.
- 1916:** John Dewey's book "Democracy and Education" is published. Dewey advocated vocational education in order to help individuals understand the nature of society and work.
- 1917:** Federal support for vocational education began with the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. Senator Hoke Smith's and Representative Dudley Mays Hughes' act reflected the view that youth should be prepared for entry-level jobs by learning specific occupational skills in separated vocational schools. Charles A. Prosser is the first federal Commissioner for Vocational Education, a position created by the Smith-Hughes Act.
- 1925:** The American Vocational Association (now the Association of Career and Technical Education, 2001) is founded and considered to be the authority for vocational education.
- 1927:** Vocational rehabilitation is made a responsibility of each state board and assigned its own division: the Division of Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation. It will remain with vocational education for ten years, when it will become a division directly under the State Department of Education.
- 1930-60:** Vocational guidance and education remain relatively unchanged during this time. Funding increased and vocational education expanded to include additional occupations and areas of education. Federal programs were also established to meet the demands of the time such as to reduce unemployment following the Great Depression, assist the war effort, and include junior (now community) colleges.
- 1963:** The Vocational Education Act provided increased federal support for vocational education. The focus, however, shifted from specific programs to meeting the needs of different categories of people. Federal funds were authorized to support residential vocational schools, vocational work-study programs, research, training, and demonstrations in vocational education.
- 1964-74:** New legislation continued to affect vocational counseling and education: the Civil Rights Act, Economic Opportunity Act, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Higher Education Act, Adult Education Act, and Women's Educational Equity Act.

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- 1984:** *The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act was passed with two major goals, one economic and the other social. The economic goal was to improve the skills of the labor force and prepare adults for job opportunities. The social goal was to provide equal opportunities for adults in vocational education.*
- 1990:** *The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act authorized the largest amount of federal funds ever for vocational education.*
- 1994:** *The School-to-Work Opportunities Act provided for partnerships between educators and employers to build a highly-skilled workforce.*
- 1998:** *The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 expanded upon the previous 1990 Perkins Act, giving states and local agencies greater flexibility in developing career and technical programs, while also holding them more accountable for student performance.*
The Workforce Investment Act was designed to better meet the needs of the nation's businesses. It established a framework for a unique workforce preparation and employment system.
- 2006:** *Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 2006 provides an increased focus on the academic achievement of career and technical education students, strengthens the connections between secondary and postsecondary education, and improves state and local accountability.*

**Timeline Sources: Schell, 2004; and Wonacoatt, 2003.*

References:

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