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The Impact Of An Ideal High School Curriculum On Secretarial Decisions

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THE IMPACT OF AN IDEAL HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM
ON SECRETARIAL DECISIONS

RAIRIE VIEW AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COLLEGE
GRADUATE SCHOOL

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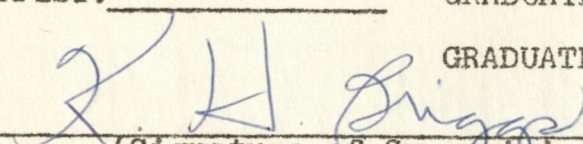
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Training offered in business education is directly related to the manpower needs of the nation. It provides a means of developing and using the maximum potential of the citizens in support of the business occupations in our economic life and activities. Business education serves management, professional, and technical personnel, training people to assume routine office responsibilities.

THE IMPACT OF AN IDEAL HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM ON
SECRETARIAL DECISIONS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Business
Prairie View A & M College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Bobbie J. James
January 1970

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SCOPE	1
The Problem	1
Need for the Study	1
II. TYPES OF SECRETARIAL DECISIONS	5
III. BUSINESS COURSE OFFERINGS	8
IV. A TYPICAL WEEK IN THE OFFICE	12
V. CORRELATION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE	16
VI. SUMMARY	18
BIBLIOGRAPHY	20

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SCOPE

The Problem

The main purpose of this study was to determine what shall be the common core curriculum for the office worker whose duties involve decision making, human relations and the expert use of electronic and computerized machinery and data.

Need for the Study

America, land of plenty of everything except available secretaries, file clerks, key punch operators and just about any other office skill you can name. Or so it may have seemed if you have looked around for good ones lately. (Especially if you have been looking for really good temporary skills). Where did they all disappear to?

It seems that growing companies simply cannot get enough of the office skills they need. That is why the market looks so thin. Maybe even invisible. Until you call Olsten. We make it our business to have skilled, conscientious temporary office people ready to fill in when and where you need them. You pay only for the work that needs doing. It is the profitable thing to do these days. All it takes is a phone call.¹

¹Newsweek, (October 1969), p. 3.

The above clever advertisement by Olsten Services who specializes in labor pools and other office services from coast to coast may be predicting the future of the business world's ability to attract and hold competent workers, skilled in the operation of compact computerized equipment, "master decision-makers" and personality pleasers.

This paper explores the makings of a skilled office worker, examines one of the long range management problems confronting every business executive today. It further endeavors to map the course of an office worker in terms of types of office decisions to be made, typical office routines and expectations. There is included also, an experimentation curriculum which could serve as a business office worker's "foundation" making maximum use of time and facilities available. Recognizing the fact that all offices are not identical, a typical week in the office in which all of the above aspects of the job may come together, is analyzed.

A typical week in the office is intended to illustrate the complexity of office work and the need for a close scrutiny of the selective process by which potential office workers are chosen, the training procedures, curriculum and advanced studies programs and most important, the motivation and zeal required to contribute to the giant world of industry or the mini-world of the small business.

The function of business education in high schools, like the function of all other types of education, is to facilitate human adjustments. Human beings must eat, wear clothing, and provide for a shelter. Human beings must also seek comforts and luxuries. As mentioned earlier, the function of business education is to facilitate human adjustments.

The majority of peoples' desires and needs are dependent upon and obtained through the effective training and teaching of students taking business subjects in high school. Additionally, the quantity and quality of business subjects taught in high schools have significant bearing on adolescents decision making and adjustment.

Many schools "go light on the surface" with programs of business training in high schools for secretarial personnel. High school business educators find themselves in a quandry in developing today's business education programs. The difficulty is the result of increased pressures upon the student to take more academic subjects and of the length of time necessary to prepare vocationally competent students.

The degree of success of a secretarial student's future life depends, in part, on the kind of business program the student followed while in school. Well developed programs of business education in high schools are very rewarding. The student has been introduced to a reasonable amount of business subjects, secondly, and most important, the student will be more prepared and capable for jobs offered in the business fields. It has become very obvious that businessmen have tried to gear many of the business programs in high schools to meet their demands. This only gives another good reason for a well, but reasonably developed program of business education in high schools.

There is such a shortage of secretaries these days that a large percentage of available positions cannot be filled. "A good secretary is hard to find," is the common expression of the day. Most executives agree

no technological development is going to change this scene for the foreseeable future. This will result in a serious business dilemma due to our inability to produce highly skilled office workers who will continue in secretarial careers.

CHAPTER II

TYPES OF SECRETARIAL DECISIONS

Effective office management necessitates the ability to make decisions. Each of the fundamental functions of office management requires decision making in its execution. Determining the course of actions to follow or appraising a situation involves decision making. Decisions should be based on adequate facts, and these facts are often difficult to obtain. The successful secretary carefully distinguishes between facts and opinions and utilizes only those data which are definitely related and pertinent to the problem at hand. Frequently, all the facts cannot be secured, in which case the best decision based on the known facts should be made, with the realization that future adjustments may be necessary. Normally, decisions should be based on a logical or reasoned approach, with due regard given to the intent of the enterprise.²

In addition to the above mentioned facts, secretaries must be able to exercise ingenuity. To a considerable extent, all progress in the realm of decision making, is dependent upon the creation and the development of successful ideas. Most improvements start as ideas, or a

²M. E. Fitch, "Education of the Educational Secretary," Today's Education. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965, p. 5.

better way of performing an office task, a simplified way of securing or insuring a firm's prosperity, rearranging of data on paper or forms, etc. Such ideas stem from a secretary being able to observe and to think.

Following is a list of areas in which secretaries make serious decisions repeatedly:

1. Deciding how to analyze and evaluate office jobs.
2. Being able to eliminate needless duplication in paper work.
3. Knowing when to adhere to customs or convention.
4. Deciding how to handle incoming and out-going mail.
5. Deciding the extent of office automation to be used.
6. Decisions in establishing standards in office work.
7. The apportionment of work among the organizational units.
8. How to motivate office employees.
9. Knowing when and how to delegate authority.
10. Deciding how much supervision is needed.
11. Deciding in some instances, how to arrange the office layout.
12. Knowing how to coordinate the work of the office with that of the nonoffice.
13. Deciding how to develop office systems, procedures, and methods.
14. Knowing how to select and utilize office electronic machines.

There exists in companies almost everywhere, vast possibilities for qualified executive secretaries. The future is indeed brilliant for the qualified executive secretary. Originally, a secretary was a confidant, entrusted with the secrets of the employer. Today's top secretary usually still fills that role. In addition, she is office administrator and her employer's good right arm. She often answers his routine correspondence and helps prepare drafts for his speeches and papers. Usually, in small offices, the secretary fills the role of clerk and stenographer herself, with only one assistant.³

Poor quality impedes the essential services of an office. Poor quality can result in loss of good will for the company. An improper decision made by the secretary may result in a loss of time and money. Sometimes the loss is unnoticed, nevertheless, it is present. Decisions must be made regarding who does what work, who reports to whom, what members are in a certain work group, and who decides what types of issues.⁴

Superiors do not want weak secretarial subordinates. The secretary in great demand releases her potentials. She creates opportunities, makes valid decisions and stimulates the growth of the company or department.

³Changing Times, XXIII, Washington, D. C.: The Kiplinger Washington Editors, Inc., (May 1969), p. 10.

⁴E. Buchanan, "Growing Opportunities for Women in Management," Management. New York: South-Western Publishing Company, 1960, p. 56.

CHAPTER III

BUSINESS COURSE OFFERINGS

The high school business graduate will ordinarily enter the business world as an office worker or as a sales person in order to make use of his training and in order to earn income and obtain practical experience. Within a few years, however, some will be operating their own small business. Whether he intends to remain an employee for a business or have a business of his own, the high school business student should be given, in his business classes, the opportunity to develop a type of economic competency.⁵

Many schools require only 16 units - 4 units a year. If the schools require only 16 units a year, and 12 to 14 of the 16 are in the solid subjects (English, social studies, mathematics, laboratory, fine arts and language), the student is left with only 2 to 4 electives in his four-year program. Therefore, raising the required number of units to 20 to 24 seems necessary. If the administration cannot increase the business course requirements, business teachers should advocate such an increase because business education students - students of primary interest to us in business education, would benefit much from such action.

⁵Thomas I. Hopkins, Curriculum Principles and Practices. New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, Inc., 1959, p. 453.

The business students are the students suffering the consequences of increased pressures to enroll in more academic classes, while students in liberal arts areas are not feeling such pressures.

Subjects and Sequences to be Offered

Another improvement that should be considered is the establishment of a business education curriculum based upon selected sequences that will competently prepare the student, upon completing a particular sequence, with marketable skills. Too few business education programs are set up in a sequential order, resulting in three major deficiencies: (1) the student is not properly guided through the education problem; (2) the student is permitted to wander at random through the curriculum; and (3) the program objectives are less apt to be clearly defined for the benefit of the student, the administration, the guidance department and the parent.⁶

The specific sequences to be established will differ somewhat from school to school. Because the need for similar types of vocational preparation is quite uniform throughout the nation, however, most schools are experiencing common needs and problems.

Certain business subjects exist that are common to the needs of all business education students; for example, typewriting, economics, basic business, and bookkeeping. These subjects could form a "core" in the business program.

⁶Ibid., p. 455.

The suggested curriculum is separated into four sequences: secretarial, clerical, general, and distributive. If several sequences cannot be offered, the particular sequences constituting the program will depend upon a number of factors: (1) the program; (2) the size of the school and adequacy of personnel, facilities, and equipment; (3) the size and needs of the business community and; (4) the geographical location of the school and its proximity to industrial areas. A suggested secretarial sequence is:

<u>SUBJECTS</u>	<u>UNITS</u>
Typewriting II	1/2
Shorthand	1
Transcription	1/2
Secretarial Practice	1/2
Bookkeeping II	1/2

Some administrators and teachers may find that 1 1/2 units of shorthand are essential to develop the fundamental shorthand skills necessary for vocational competency; undoubtedly, the offering of 1 1/2 units would be preferable under most circumstances to the offering of one unit.⁷

Many educators believe the sequences to be inadequate for competent vocational training. These sequences are just a starting point. Without a properly constructed business education program, business educators cannot make their maximum contributions to society. A program

⁷Thomas I. Hopkins, Curriculum Principles and Practices. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1959, p. 456.

that will clearly direct the student through this training and education, one that includes competent vocational preparation and economic understandings, is an essential part of the total educational process of the individual.

Those who go into office work right after high school should try for additional training after they start working. Find out what college-level instruction is available in your community in such courses as English and Economics, and see what further training local business schools and adult education courses have to offer. Too often high school graduates lack the knowledge of business law, accounting and business administration that will help them get ahead.⁸

The broader your educational background, the better. The best jobs in the future will go to graduates of four-year colleges with degrees in secretarial administration or business administration, or to college graduates who have supplemented their education with training in a business school.⁹

⁸Changing Times, XXIII, Washington, D. C.: The Kiplinger Washington Editors, Inc., (May 1969), p. 10.

⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

A TYPICAL WEEK IN THE OFFICE

It is anticipated that automation will probably make the office life of tomorrow much easier, the secretary is definitely not on her way out. Efficient business units mean social well-being. This can only be accomplished through the trained, efficient secretary. There is no right way to teach office practices or proper office management. Much depends upon the ability of the secretary, the type of business and the time, resources and equipment available to her in the particular office situation.

A typical week in a business office is a situation in which business skills and knowledge previously acquired in business courses, are integrated. Skills, facts, attitudes, and problem solving are all going to play an important part. In addition to typing and shorthand, any day in the office, a secretary will be expected to: (1) sort and classify mail; (2) operate office machines; (3) make cross-reference; (4) decide what to do and tell someone to do it; (5) Follow up to see if something has been done; (6) point out how things should be done to subordinates; (7) receive callers; (8) make appointments and numerous other activities which secretaries spend more than half of their time performing. All of these things should be learned before the student is ready for an office position.

Successful performance in the office depends on the secretary's ability to understand people, the profit motive, and the products and services of the company.¹⁰ The degree of success also depends on the particular individual and the knowledge she has in the field in which she is working. One should have a functioning knowledge of the technology of the particular company. Social competency, which is also important, is a composite of personal characteristics such as appearance, attitude, and initiative. These are all qualifying factors for initial employment and retention in employment.¹¹

There is no need to make constant mention of the basic skills of communication and mathematics as they relate to the secretarial employment situation. In fact, the entire secretarial picture revolves around being able to communicate in the office. All of these tools are prerequisites for daily success in the office.

Further amplification of the above theories is evident in the following excerpts from a recent Houston Post article describing the National Secretaries Association, Houston Chapter selection of the secretary of the year.

¹⁰ Stanley M. Brown, Business Executives Handbook. New York: John Wiley & Son, Inc., 1966, p. 36.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 40.

"She is a housekeeper who tidies up the office, a public relations official who greets visiting businessmen, a travel agent who arranges flight plans and reservations, a diplomat and is also poised, efficient and well dressed."

The winner of the coveted title, Secretary of the Year has this to say about her successful career:

The qualities that make a good secretary are intangible. Of course, any secretary must have good skills, but skills alone are not enough. She must be mature, responsible and able to meet people. There is no such thing as a typical secretary. A secretary's duties are as varied as the people she works for.

There is not a great deal of routine in my work. Oh, you have the filing, phone calls and other correspondence, but each day is different. For example, if the boss is going on a trip, travel arrangements must be made. A secretary also does a certain amount of housekeeping in an office. She must see that coffee is served to guests - a whole variety of duties.

She decided that she wanted to become a secretary while she was still in high school. She studied for a year at the University of Houston, then went to work as a stenographer at Gulf. I have been here every since, she said with a smile.

Her day usually begins around 7:30 A. M. when she arrives at the office, and ends when her boss goes home. I try to keep the same hours as my boss, she explained. I never leave before he does. That way I'm here whenever he needs me.

She resents the image of the secretary as someone who is just bidding her time until she can marry the boss. A secretary is a professional person. She creates an image for her company so she must set a good example. The majority of secretaries are dedicated working women.

The National Secretaries Association is striving to create an image of the professional secretary. It sponsors a testing

program for secretaries which enables them to earn the title of certified professional secretary.

The 12 hour exam covers accounting, business law, human relations, business administration and secretarial skills.¹²

The winner successfully completed the examination several years ago. "A secretary is constantly meeting new people and the impression she makes must be a good one," she said. "In this case appearances are important. A sloppy secretary conveys the image of a sloppy company. I think every secretary should be stylish and well-dressed."¹³

¹²Houston Post Newspaper, January 20, 1970, p. 12.

¹³Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CORRELATION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

The secondary school of today is conceived as an agent for the development of intelligent citizenship. As such, it seeks to correlate the theory of the classroom with behavior patterns which are deemed necessary and desirable in a democratic society. The disciplines of science, mathematics, languages, history, and English are important in the curriculum, but they do not constitute the complete core of knowledge necessary to give youth an education for living in a complex society dominated by business.¹⁴ The learnings of prior years about business and the economic system provides basis for the fullest development in any situation.

Being able to put into practice what has been learned in the classroom, means being able to do what has to be done in the office without being constantly "hounded" about it. If an executive wants a report by three, he expects to be given the report, not a collection of excuses for not having it ready on time. Being dependable means your employer can give you any job assignment and not have to worry about how well it will be done. It means you will ask questions about any instructions that are not clear instead of taking a chance, guessing, and doing

¹⁴ M. E. Fitch, "Education of the Educational Secretary," Today's Education. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965, p. 9.

the job wrong. It means the employer can count on you every day. Most employers recognize that everyone has "off" days, but if you are dependable they do not occur very often.

Since businessmen have a tendency to evaluate an entire school system by the performance of those who have graduated from the business education department, this department needs to continuously evaluate and revise its business program. With the addition of other business subjects and specifically more subjects geared towards secretarial training being included in our high schools. Our communities should greatly increase in effective and profitable business standards.

VI . SUMMARY

Training offered in business education is directly related to the manpower needs of the nation. It provides a means of developing and using the maximum potential of the citizens in support of the business occupations in our economic life and activities. Business education serves management, professional, and technical personnel, training people to assume routine office responsibilities.

The scope of office work is such that it can include a considerable ability range. Some secretarial occupations are routine and quite simple, others are extremely complex and require the highest of abilities. The secretarial field is one which attracts late entry on the part of widows who must suddenly support themselves, elderly persons and mothers with young children who wish partial employment. Office work offers a socially acceptable place for workers where they can be useful and successful citizens.

In reviewing the predicted growth of clerical workers, the need for business education can be observed. Most of the students who enroll in the business courses are girls who generally marry and raise a family after working a short period time. Therefore, it is necessary to train a greater number than the anticipated need. Because of the type of persons involved in this group, it is desirable to have a pool of trained secretaries in excess of any given number at any time.

A periodic review of the business education program should be undertaken to be sure that the business occupational needs of the communities served by the program are adequate. Guidance should be provided to vocational students to assist them in better reaching their occupational objectives.

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