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THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION PROCESS OF STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL IN THE UNITED STATES

Summary: Der Beitrag setzt sich kritisch mit der Vielzahl von Programmen und Gesetzgebungsinitiativen in den USA auseinander, die zur Verbesserung der Übergangssituation auf eine Institutionalisierung von Koordinations- und Kooperationsformen zwischen Schule und Wirtschaft zielen. Bisher haben diese Ansätze nur wenig zur Problemlösung beim Übergang von der High School in das Beschäftigungssystem beitragen können. Knapp die Hälfte eines Geburtsjahrganges verlässt das Bildungssystem ohne verwertbaren High-School- oder College-Abschluss und ist damit auf instabile, prekäre Arbeitsplätze verwiesen. Die Analyse bestätigt die institutionellen Barrieren gegen die Etablierung eines (eigenständigen) Berufsbildungssektors oder auch gegen die „Verberuflichung“ allgemeiner Bildungsgänge in einem Umfeld, das traditionell die Absolventen des Bildungssystems ohne arbeitsmarktrelevante Abschlüsse entlässt.

1. Introduction

In the United States, recent educational studies, reforms, legislation and initiatives have targeted the need for improved communication and cooperation between education and business/industry relative to the educational preparation of young people. These events have been precipitated by several trends, including the belief that weaknesses in the educational system in the United States were hampering the country's economic productivity and competitiveness. As a result, much discussion has centered on the transition of young people from the school setting to the workplace. This "school-to-work transition" process has identified schools, students, parents, employers, communities and federal, state and local governmental agencies as the stakeholders involved. Goals related to this transition include increasing the academic performance of all students, developing career awareness, and providing students with relevant workplace experiences in order to draw real-life connections between academics and careers (Zirkle, 1999).

2. School-to-Work Transition in the United States: An Historical Perspective

In the United States, vocational education has historically been regarded as “education for work”. The development of job-specific, technical skills for the workplace has been vocational education’s primary focus. This focus has been supported by federal legislation for over 85 years. The federal legislation and funding is channeled to each of the states for the implementation of vocational education programming, primarily for high school youth.

Several key pieces of legislation have paved the way for the growth of vocational education in the United States. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 was enacted in part as a response to twentieth-century problems of industrialization, automation, urbanization and the need for more skilled workers (Calhoun & Finch, 1982). It provided federal funding for vocational training in the areas of agriculture, trade and industry and home economics. In addition, the Smith-Hughes Act required state boards to draft plans relating to the use of funds, types of schools, equipment, courses of study, methods of instruction, teacher qualifications, supervisor qualifications and plans for training teachers (Calhoun & Finch, 1982). Smith-Hughes was the first major piece of federal legislation to directly stimulate growth in vocational education. The legislation achieved its goal, as enrollment in federally subsidized programs doubled during the first two years (Venn, 1964). One of the more exciting aspects of the Smith-Hughes Act was that it called for private sector participation in education (Smith, 1983).

During World War II, the United States Congress put more than \$ 100 million into a program called Vocational Education for National Defense, which between 1940 and 1945, gave seven million war production workers pre-employment and supplementary training (Venn, 1964). This program led to the George-Barden Act of 1946, which authorized additional appropriations for programs, yet provided greater flexibility as to their use.

As the 1960s approached, the United States economy was feeling the effects of a bad recession in 1958, with youth unemployment alarmingly high. There was a growing consensus that the federal government should act to solve problems of unemployment, the rising costs of living, the rights of minorities and the desperate need for qualified skilled workers in business and industry (Calhoun & Finch, 1982). President Kennedy’s administration began efforts that culminated in three pieces of legislation: The Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962, The Vocational Education Act of 1963 and The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Each of these Acts were directed, at least in part, at reinvigorating parts of the training-for-work system (Smith, 1983).

The Education Amendments of 1976 affected vocational education by extending and revising the Vocational Education Act of 1963. This act provided funding for persons who had entered the world of work but found a need to upgrade or learn new skills. It proposed to provide ready access to vocational education and training to persons in secondary and postsecondary schools. It also included provisions for programs addressing the needs of the broad range of occupations that utilize specialized skills and encouraged participation of employers and labor organizations in vocational education through special programs.

The Carl D. Perkins Act of 1984 targeted the education and skill development of special needs populations. It required funds be spent to provide equal access for special populations in recruiting and enrollment, guidance services to facilitate the transition from school-to-work and adaptation of the curriculum, instruction, facilities and equipment.

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act of 1990 instituted many changes in the field of vocational education. The reform movements of the 1980's required vocational education to respond by integrating academic and vocational education, focusing on tangible outcomes and by serving the growing number of academically and economically disadvantaged youth. The Perkins Act required each state to implement core performance standards and measures of accountability. These were related to several areas, including academic achievement of basic and higher order skills, occupational competency and skill attainment.

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 focused on the national concern that high school graduates lacked the basic skills needed to succeed in the global workplace. Emphasis was placed on academic skills, computer skills and problem-solving, teamwork and employability skills.

Federal legislative efforts regarding vocational education have consistently emphasized the need for the availability to all individuals of proper vocational training in order to become productive members of society. Political, societal and economic needs have all shaped legislative efforts through the years, but vocational education has traditionally been shaped by the changing needs of the people (Calhoun & Finch, 1982). Future legislation regarding vocational education will doubtless be shaped by this force as well.

In addition to federal legislation, other models that existed before school-to-work transition programs have also sought to establish links between school and work and gave students some type of work experience. The four models are cooperative education, career academies, Tech Prep and youth apprenticeship.

Cooperative education has historically consisted of a vocational instructor, or co-op coordinator, who arranged part-time jobs for students with local employers.

A worksite evaluator assisted the student at the workplace. Training plans are articulated between the school and the worksite. While sometimes effective, co-op education has fallen short of the goal of a comprehensive school-to-work linkage that has been desired. Some reasons for this failure are haphazard integration of school and workplace learning, poor employer participation and little support for academic learning (Mendel, 1994). Still, cooperative education is an option more than 500,000 high school students participate in annually (Marshall, 1997).

Career academies allow students to get work experience and coursework within a particular job family, such as communication, health or business. These academies also integrate academic learning into the career program. Local employers are encouraged to become involved through providing work experience opportunities. While generally successful, career academies have been difficult to replicate. Some of the reasons cited for this are the high amount of participation required on the part of employers, high costs associated with the intensive remediation and special attention the students need to receive and the extra preparation time required by teachers (Stern, 1991).

Tech Prep, pioneered by Dale Parnell, is a partnership between secondary schools and two-year technical and community colleges that culminates in an associate degree or certification in a career field. Typically called „2+2“ programs, the students spend the first two years (the junior and senior years of high school) taking college preparatory classes in math and science along with a vocational program and, in many cases, receive college credit for coursework completed in high school. Upon entering a community college or technical school, the student is granted advanced status as a result of his/her high school experience. Through this arrangement, the goal of smoothing the transition from secondary to postsecondary education is accomplished.

Youth apprenticeship programs have attempted to take the best elements of the career academy (part-time work for an employer within a specific vocation) and Tech Prep (articulation into a two-year or four-year college or university). In addition, youth apprenticeships offer the incentive of an industry-recognized skill certificate along with a high potential for employment with participating employers. Much of the call for youth apprenticeship has been provided by business and industry, which has seen similar youth apprenticeship models in Germany and Japan succeed. In the United States, apprenticeship is becoming more attractive option for preparing workers for the high-tech workplace because of its demands for technical, interpersonal, informational and lifelong learning skills (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2001)

Historically, the United States has been very good at legislating and creating innovative programs (Kazis, 1993). However, a major problem has been one of

structuring these innovative programs into a system that fully utilizes the talents, expertise and knowledge of education and business and industry in a collaborative, rather than an antagonistic, environment. Finally, the system needs to be one that provides for all students, not just certain groups of students (Halperin, 1994 A).

3. The Changing US Economy and its Effect on Successful Transition

Historically, the legislative efforts aimed at worker training, vocational education and the training-for-work system have run slightly behind the needs of business and industry in the United States. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 was the first direct response to the changing needs of the country as it moved from a largely agrarian society to an industrialized one, with an increased need for skilled workers. As technology progressed through the decades, the educational system has strained to keep up with the changes. Today, the rapid growth of in-house training in major United States corporations is a result of the slow response of the country's educational system at all levels to keep up with the needs of business (Dunkleberg, 2003).

The school-to-work process began to get attention in the 1980's, as some economic trends began to point out potential problems. Productivity growth began to drop in comparison to other industrialized countries, raising concerns about international competitiveness (Stull, 2003). In addition, wages for unskilled workers fell significantly in the 1980's (Gottschalk, 1997). The United States economy was rapidly becoming a system of "haves" and "have-nots", as individuals without tangible skills fell farther behind, creating large wage gaps. Today in the United States, there are precious few employment opportunities for unskilled labor. Recent studies have shown less than 20% of the workforce to be in jobs classified as unskilled (Lynch, 2000; Nakamura, 2003). In contrast, other labor market studies have shown the most promising segment of the future workforce in the United States comprises technical workers (Gray & Herr, 1998).

These economic trends began to point to some contributing shortcomings in the United States related to technical skill training and the labor markets of other countries. Lynch (1993) found one key difference between the labor markets of the United States and those in Europe and Japan. The skill development of the workforce was characterized by a high degree of coordination between employers, government, schools and other training providers. Lynch (1993) also found that only 30% of U.S. youths were involved with vocational training, as opposed to 70% in West Germany and 50% in Sweden. In addition, only a small percentage of the U.S. students involved in vocational education were participating in some

type of school-to-work transition effort. Other studies (Holzer, 1996; Zemsky, 1994) found that too many students left secondary schools without the necessary skills to succeed in the world of work.

The global economy, technological advances, and the rapidly changing needs of the American workplace have placed a greater emphasis on the successful transition of secondary school graduates into the world of work. Students in the United States can no longer expect to obtain well-paying employment with anything less than a high quality high school education.

4. School-to-Work Transition Defined

Transition is defined by Webster's dictionary as passage from one state, stage or place to another (Sarkees & Scott, 1995). Cheek and Campbell (1993) stated that „transition connotes a change, movement, development, or evolution from one stage to another“ (p.116). Recent definitions of school-to-work transition have taken the ideas of passage and change and applied them to the process by which all young people exit the school system and enter the world of work. Will (1986) called transition “a period which includes high school, the point of graduation, additional postsecondary education or adult services and the initial years in employment” (p. 121).

Most definitions of school-to-work transition describe it in terms of process and purpose. Smith (1983) stated that school-to-work transition was designed to ease the passage of youth from the classroom to the workplace. Feichtner (1989) wrote that the purpose of such programs was to provide individuals with experiences that will help them develop skills and attitudes needed to secure and keep employment, to secure and maintain a meaningful adult life style and to develop positive social interactions.

Halperin (1994B) described the school-to-work transition as the cornerstone of schooling. He described the process as a systematic, comprehensive, community-wide effort to help all young people:

1. Prepare for high skill and high-wage careers.
2. Receive top quality academic instruction.
3. Gain foundation skills to pursue post-secondary education and lifelong learning (p. 4).

The recent interest in school-to-work programs has led governmental agencies to become involved. The General Accounting Office (1993) defined four components of a comprehensive school-to-work strategy:

There are processes for developing the academic and occupational competencies of all students

1. There are career education and development activities for all students
2. There are established, extensive links between schools and employers.
3. There are meaningful workplace experiences for all students. (p. 2).

Pease and Copa (1993) described two identifying features of school-to-work transition. First, there are two different, expressed states - a before and an after. The before state is as student, the after is as worker. Second, there is some type of bridge between the two states- the passage over which change is produced.

5. Characteristics of Effective School-to-Work Transition in the United States

There have been several studies, articles, monographs and other documents constructed that outline the problems with the United States' system of school to work transition. However, little has been studied and defined relative to what characterizes effective school-to-work transition. The recent School-to-Work Opportunities Act, passed in 1994, has given educators some indication of what elements must be present for effective transition.

Packer & Pines (1997) examined some "promising practices" with respect to school-to-work transition. They were able to define common, but critical themes for the success, including the following:

1. Career awareness at the elementary and middle school levels that introduces students to the world of work
2. Career exploration and counseling for early-grades high school students
3. Structured work-based learning opportunities for all students
4. Coordination of school and work-based learning
5. Recognition of the diverse learning needs of all students and provisions for multiple learning strategies (p. 241-42).

Olsen (1997) suggested some specific keys to success in school-to-work programming, including equal partnerships between education and business in the edu-

cational process of students, opportunities for students to apply classroom learning to real-life situations in the workplace, and encouraging ongoing learning and career exploration and planning. Marshall (1997) defined several important design features for a successful school-to-work system:

1. Achievement in school must be connected to rewards in the labor market
2. No single approach or program can meet the needs of all students
3. The school-to-work system must be available for all youth
4. Career awareness and guidance are a necessity
5. Vocational programming must have rigorous academic content
6. The school-to-work process should have postsecondary education options
7. Follow up studies on students must be constructed
8. The school-to-work system has to be comprehensive to reach all students
9. All partners (schools, business and industry, parents, the community, etc.) must be linked together
10. School-to-work must be a part of educational change in the United States
11. School-to-work should be tied to research, specifically research on effective learning (pp. 219–222)

In the United States, with its 50 states and thousands of locally-operated school districts, designing school-to-work systems that meet these criteria has proven difficult. Countless barriers to the effective transition of students from school to the workplace presently exist.

6. Barriers to Effective Transition

During the decade of the 1990's, the United States system of education was roundly criticized in comparison to other countries with regard to the preparation of students for the world of work. In a United States General Accounting Office (1990) study, four other countries (Japan, England, West Germany and Sweden) were found to:

1. Expect students to do well in school, while the United States accepts as a given that
2. some students will not keep pace
3. Have competency-based national training standards, while the United States merely certifies program completion

4. Invest major sums of money in programs for students preparing for work, while the United States spent half as much on these individuals as those destined for college
5. Provide substantially better guidance than the United States for students who have prepared for work and are in transition toward a job. (p. 3).

The report (1990) also found that youth in the United States received little assistance in making the transition from school-to-work, with scant orientation on employment opportunities and job requirements. The report characterized post-high school noncollege training as „haphazard and of poor quality“ (GAO, 1990, p. 25).

Needham (1992) found the school-to-work transition process in the United States to have four distinct barriers to success. These barriers were:

1. Too many high school students learn too little in the general track curriculum
2. Once out of school, the general track students are relegated to low-skill jobs for six to
3. eight years before the industry will offer them a serious job
4. Schools in the United States do not push non-college students to high academic
5. achievement and high-skill jobs via focused school-to-work transition devices
6. Because half the students in the United States receive no formal job training, a
7. shortage of skilled workers has developed, making U.S. industry hard-pressed to compete globally (p. 4)

Another United States General Accounting Office (1993) report found that many youth were ill prepared for work when they left high school, with about 30% of youth aged 16 to 24 lacking the skills for entry level employment. The report believed the situation was due to poor academic preparation, limited career guidance and limited workplace experiences. The report also stated that in order to solve this problem, the goals of all secondary schools should include having all youth possess good academic skills, marketable occupational skills and appropriate workplace behaviors.

In 1994, the United States Department of Education published *The National Assessment of Vocational Education*. The document acknowledged the poor labor market outcomes of high school graduates and proposed goals for a new system of workforce preparation. The reforms defined by the study included:

1. A system that would encompass all non-college bound and some college-bound students
2. Preparation of students for careers, not just jobs
3. Broadening the curriculum framework from occupations to industries or other more inclusive constructs
4. 4 ... Emphasizing the development of cognitive skills, broad technical skills and understanding of industries at the secondary level
5. Emphasizing the use of applications to teach underlying principles before teaching occupational procedures
6. Using work experience, including jobs students find for themselves, to increase understanding of issues such as how the labor market functions and what skills and personal qualities the workplace requires
7. Preparing most students for some form of postsecondary education and additional training
8. Deferring much, but not all occupation-specific training to the postsecondary level.
9. Establishing competency-based systems geared to high, external standards, assessed and evaluated by valid, reliable methods that lead to some type of certification
10. Allowing for other essential courses, such as core academics

The 2002 *National Assessment of Vocational Education* called for an emphasis on quality high school vocational education programs, perhaps in recognition of the significant numbers of students who graduate and immediately enter the workplace. However the report noted the difficulty with this task, since vocational education is expected to contribute to high school completion, entry into postsecondary education and training, postsecondary degree completion, and entry into employment.

7. Legislative Efforts to Aid the Transition

In addition to the aforementioned legislation supporting vocational education in the United States, in 1994, the United States Congress approved, and President Bill Clinton signed, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. The Act was in direct response to the aforementioned studies that pointed out the lack of a coherent system to connect education with employment on the part of the United States labor market where four-year degrees were not required (Gordon, 2003).

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act allocated funds to establish statewide partnerships to prepare students with the knowledge and skill needed to succeed in

the workplace. It was the first education legislation that required the community be involved in education's efforts to connect school to work (Brown, 2002). The Act had three essential program components, including; work based learning, that provided a planned program of job training or experiences, workplace mentoring, and instruction in general workplace competencies and in the elements of an industry; school-based learning that provided career exploration and counseling and instruction in a career major and; connecting activities that coordinated the involvement of employers, schools and students; and the matching of students and work-based learning opportunities.

Studies have begun to show that the School to Work Opportunities Act brought together legislators, employers, schools, parents and students in order to enhance student learning and to prepare students for meaningful work (Brown, 2002). However, in 2001, funding from the School to Work Opportunities Act ended, and many programs, begun with funding from the Act, have also ceased. Sustainability of school-to-work transition efforts without federal assistance is now the focus of many states. All the stakeholders involved in school-to-work transition efforts must continue to work together.

8. The United States Emphasis on Preparation for College

In the United States, a four-year college degree is increasingly seen as the path to success. Many school counselors advise the "best and brightest" students into college preparatory courses, and believe this to be the only viable path to student success. Parents, as well, are apparently convinced that a baccalaureate degree is an absolute necessity. Recent data indicate that more than 95% of 1992 high school seniors reported expecting to attend college (Berkner & Chavez, 1997).

Despite the emphasis on a four-year college degree, studies have found that the largest growing segments of the technical workforce is for occupations that do not require a four-year college degree (Gray & Herr, 1998). Recent job data indicate the fastest growing sector will not be those jobs requiring a bachelor's degree, rather an associate degree or some type of postsecondary vocational training (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002). Interestingly, many Americans with bachelors' degrees are returning to vocational courses in community colleges (National Assessment of Vocational Education, 2002), as the degree they have earned has not provided them with the technical skills needed for the American workplace. In addition to job data, statistics on the number of students who actually complete a 4-year degree are disappointing. A recent study by the United States Department

of Education (2000) showed that while nearly three-quarters of all students participated in postsecondary education, only 30% completed a bachelor's degree or higher.

While a four-year degree is appropriate for some students, labor market data support the need for other levels and types of educational preparation. Vocational education can provide the skills needed for high school students to be successful upon graduation or prepare them for postsecondary technical education, likely leading to an associate's degree. More students in the United States should be made aware of these other options to a four-year degree.

9. Transition for Students with Special Learning Needs

The public schools in the United States contain a large number of individuals with special learning needs. The 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) defined a student with special learning needs as a:

child having mental retardation, a hearing impairment including deafness, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment including blindness, serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, and other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

In addition to defined disabilities and learning needs, the ability of special needs students to achieve a successful transition from school to work is difficult. In the United States, there is little or no systematic process for delivering school-to-work transition services, especially for students with disadvantages and limited English proficiency (Feichtner, 1989). This lack of coordination between parents, teachers, counselors, employers and community agencies has created barriers to the development of a continuum of services for special needs learners.

The federal government has recognized the requirements of special needs students for several decades. The most recent piece of legislation, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, defined transition as a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that, among other aspects, is designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training and integrated employment.

Special needs advocates have called for a number of initiatives and changes in the way special needs students receive transition services, including:

1. A coordinated system of education and work preparation, with a focus on learning and successful transition
2. All students, regardless of disability, need to be included in education and training programs
3. Special needs students should develop a sense of independence and self-sufficiency through their participation in education and training programs
4. Program access and program excellence should both be emphasized
5. The knowledge gained from school-to-work transition practices from special needs students should be used to improve academic and vocational education and training school-to-work transition practices for all students, not just those with special learning needs (Stodden, 1998, p. 74)

The transition from school-to-work for special needs learners has not been easy because of their disabilities and because of the deeply ingrained attitudes of the general public toward serving these individuals adequately and giving them a chance to prove themselves as good employees (Sarkees & Scott, 1995). The purpose of school-to-work transition for special needs learners has been to minimize the barriers in preparing for and obtaining employment. Despite federal legislation and much effort from the special needs community, the barriers still exist.

10. The Forgotten Half of United States Students

Because of the emphasis on a college degree in the United States, some students are cast aside. In 1988, The William T. Grant Foundation, Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, published *The Forgotten Half: Non-College Youth in America*, that examined the approximately 20 million 16–24 year-olds who do not pursue a college education. The report detailed the shrinking opportunities in the workforce for this group of individuals and suggested making available a better “first chance” that would emphasize improved schooling in general to give non-college youth better preparation for entering the workforce. The report offered ways to improve the school-to-work transition of all youth, along with programs of intervention for at-risk youth. The report also called for equal access to lifelong learning and increased public support of education. A companion final report, *The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families* (1988), again emphasized public support and equal access to educational opportunities, along with improved support services and interagency cooperation, and a variety of program options.

Halperin (1998) published *The Forgotten Half Revisited: American Youth and Young Families 1998–2008* which showed that almost half (48.2%) of all adults did not complete high school or did not attend college after high school graduation. The report also pointed out that these individuals still faced bleak job opportunities that Grant described ten years prior, despite numerous educational reforms. The lack of a defined school-to-work system in the United States was still causing this group to flounder as they moved from high school into the workplace.

Clearly, these reports call for an increased focus on the large proportion of United States students that do not pursue a college education. Their educational preparation in high school must provide them with the necessary skills to enter the workplace and succeed.

11. The Skills Needed for Effective Transition

Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the types of skills students need to qualify as entry-level workers once they have exited secondary school. All have been in response to changes in the workplace and the requisite change in the skills that are the result. In 1984, The National Academy of Sciences (NAS), through a panel of employers, labor union representatives, educators and scholars, examined the skills required of high school graduates to successfully enter the workforce. The resulting document, *High Schools and the Changing Workplace: The Employers View*, identified ten core competencies required of all workers, regardless of position or job:

1. Command of the English language
2. Reasoning and problem solving
3. Reading
4. Writing
5. Computation
6. Science and technology
7. Oral communication
8. Interpersonal relationships
9. Social and economic studies
10. Personal work habits

Related to the ten core competencies, the panel cited three basic findings. First, the major asset needed by the workforce is the ability to learn new knowledge and adapt to the rapidly changing workplace. Second, the ten core competencies are

required at all levels of the workforce. Finally, a positive attitude and sound work habits are greatly valued by employers (NAS, 1984).

Carnevale, Gainer and Meltzer (1990) published *Workplace Basics: The Essential Skills Employers Want*, which focused on determining those skills held in high esteem by employers. The text was an expansion of an earlier study co-sponsored by The American Society for Training and Development and the United States Department of Labor in 1988. The list of skills, which was quite extensive, included:

1. Reading, writing and computational skills
2. Listening and oral communication skills
3. Creative thinking and problem-solving skills
4. Goal setting and motivational skills
5. Personal and career development skills
6. Interpersonal, negotiation and teamwork skills

America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!, published in 1990 by The Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, discussed the slowing rate of workforce productivity, due primarily to American industry competing more on the basis of low wages and low skills versus the high wage, high skill emphasis of foreign competitors. The report proposed improving the education of American workers in order to compete on a high wage, high skill platform. The report also recommended national performance standards and a certificate of „initial mastery“.

In the United States, perhaps the most key report to address the skills students need to successfully exit secondary education and transition to the workplace or to higher education, has been the *Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills* (SCANS), published in 1991 by the United States Department of Labor. The document outlined five essential competencies that schools should develop in students, focusing on the ability to:

1. Identify, organize, plan, and allocate resources
2. Work with others
3. Acquire and use information
4. Understand complex interrelationships
5. Work with a variety of technologies

All these workplace competencies were to be developed through three instructional elements schools should also emphasize, including basic skills, higher level thinking skills and the development of personal qualities.

12. Summary

The transition from school to the workplace in the United States has long been a subject of interest. From the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 to the present day, the educational system has tried to effectively prepare students for the requirements of employment. As this chapter has illustrated, the process is a difficult one, and one that is continually evolving. For the continued prosperity of the country, the school to work transition must be successful.

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