

Children Must Choose Careers Early

IN ORDER to get started in the right direction, children of the future may have to make choices of careers early in life.

An apparent conflict has arisen between Oklahoma's excellent vocational and technical education programs and logical proposals for improving the quality of high school education for those students preparing to attend college. Probably it will be resolved acceptably.

Even so, the outcome may place a burden on youngsters who must decide whether to prepare for college-trained professions or technical trades before they have had much opportunity to observe either. Factory tours give only superficial impressions, romanticized business presentations on TV often are misleading, and many youngsters have no observation of their parents at places of employment.

Child labor laws prevent youngsters from getting jobs of their own until age 16 and minimum wage laws limit employment for teenagers who haven't been taught to work dependably and cooperatively.

Parents aren't always reliable guides in choices of careers for youngsters. One lady introduced her children, ages 2, 4 and 6, to a friend by saying: "The older one will be a doctor, the next one a scientist, and the youngest will be a lawyer." Such blind approaches result in merchants who would rather be aviators, surgeons who would prefer to be ranchers, and lawyers who might be better salesmen.

Most teachers lack broad experience or observation of careers needed to qualify them as competent career counselors.

Because new college entrance requirements to take effect in 1988 will require more rigid high school curricula, Dr. Frances Tuttle, director of the Oklahoma Department of Vocational Education, says enrollment in the state's 24 vo-tech centers may be cut in half. But unless students learn more English, history, math and science they may be unable to meet college entrance requirements.

Both types of training are needed and many students would like to

have both. A divinity school professor some years ago asked his class: "If all the garbage men and all the preachers quit at the same time, which would you miss first?" There is a need for all types of training.

At the recent Freedom Forum for high school students in Oklahoma City, Dr. J. Terry Johnson, president of Oklahoma Christian College, said: "America is alive and well today because we have championed the work ethic."

Unfortunately, millions of youngsters are growing up, as their parents may have done, without being exposed to the work ethic. They often become school dropouts.

Employment authorities say that rapid changes in business may make it necessary that a person have two or more careers in a lifetime. Large numbers of people presently are employed in types of jobs that didn't exist when they were in grade school.

It will be difficult for children to aim toward their life's work as high school freshmen, but they may have to try anyway.