

HISTORY OF CURRICULUM

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In the 19th-century, during the industrial revolution, American education evolved greatly. Teachers were the center of education; they were expected to teach children core values necessary to become reasonable citizens and to have a broad understanding of what is acceptable in society. Kliebard (2004) states that teachers were also charged with disciplining children with their “standard virtues and community values” as these were traits expected of all teachers (p. 1). Educational changes became evident at the end of the 19th century due to the industrial revolution which had an impact on curriculum in the United States (Kliebard, 2004, p.1). As cities were growing, the teachers’ charge was altered in an effort to address the needs of the new demands of growing cities. Becker et. al. (2011) explain that the “Industrial Revolution created new occupations with relatively low educational requirements, which would bias the education estimate downward. On the other hand...education may have become more affordable for broader parts of the population” (p. 93).

Standardization of curriculum already existed, as of the early 1800s, as the same textbooks were used throughout the country in order to aid teachers in the classroom (Kliebard, 2004, p.2). Textbooks helped teachers all educate students with similar content within their lessons using various teaching methods and styles. Williams Harvey Wells, a superintendent of schools in Chicago from 1856-1864, initiated school levels in which each level had a specific module of lessons for each subject or discipline (Kliebard, 2004, p.2). This began the process of prepping students in a “national preoccupation” stage in an effort to prepare them for when they are immersed into the young industrialized society (Kliebard, 2004, p. 2). Standardized levels of curriculum ensured consistent lessons were taught to children throughout the country.

The foundation of curriculum in the 1890’s was built on mental discipline (Kliebard, 2004,p.4). Christian Wolf, a German psychologist provided a framework, adopted by mental

disciplinarians, of how the human mind works when disciplined with exercising memorization, reasoning, will and imagination (Kliebard, 2004, p.4). Mental disciplinarians believed that teaching students to build these practices in their daily lives would help advance and further develop their minds. These mental practices were built into the curriculum at all levels and across all disciplines (Kliebard, 2004, p. 5). Humanists believed educating students on subject matter, reinforced with these faculties, is the main responsibility of American education. The mind was seen as a muscle that needed the “monotonous drill, harsh discipline and mindless verbatim recitation” in order to be proficient in all disciplines (Kliebard, 2004, p. 5). Kliebard (2004) states that these practices, as mentioned in the report of Yale faculty in 1828, strengthen learners by “filling the mind with content”; continuously repeating terms and content would drive concepts into student’s minds (p. 5). This repetition was believed to drive important concepts into students’ minds in an effort to aid them in their mental growth.

By 1895 humanists believed that incorporating grammar, literature and art, mathematics, geography and history into the curriculum would provide the culture of the human race throughout American society (Kliebard, 2004, p. 15). The curriculum left values and knowledge based around family, church and industry to other entities outside of the educational system.

During this same period, social meliorists were a group that believed education was the key to providing societal strength and social justice (p. 23). Their proposed curriculum focused around social progress. Lester Frank Ward was a significant figure in this group that believed that human beings had the power and ability to make societal changes for the better and that if progress did not materialize, it would be “directly attributed to maldistribution” (Kliebard, 2004, p. 22).

The Committee of Ten determined that the same curriculum for all students regardless of their interests or planned paths of employment (Kliebard, 2004, p.10). All students had a right to the same quality education and the same subjects available within the educational system.

Students who planned to not go to college will be taught at a level that colleges and universities would require for admission even if there was no intent of furthering their education to that level.

The Child Study Movement approached curriculum in a way that focused on stages of children's mental development when building curriculum. These developmentalists believed that aligning curriculum with the scientific data of child and adolescent development would provide an efficient learning protocol or path for successful learning outcomes (Kliebard, 2004, p. 24)

Social Efficiency educators during this time believed that scientific data (the same scientific data previously mentioned) should be used to save society from instability (Kliebard, 2004, p. 24).

All interest groups had a part in what was evolved into America's educational system. Humanists, developmentalists, social meliorists and social efficiency educators together contributed to the American curriculum.

References

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