

Curriculum Struggles in the 19th & 20th Century

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Kliebard gives us a synopsis on the trajectory with the ongoing competing visions of education in U.S history. Starting in the 1800's, Yale's faculty report of 1828 spoke about traditional education and humanistic value. President Jeremiah Day and Professor James K. Kingsley's viewpoint in "reaffirming the curriculum and discipline the future of the mind" (Kliebard, p. 5, 2004) launched the birth of the division of standards into different units of study. In the mid 1800's, superintendent William Harvey Wells, "divided city students into grades and subjects" (Kliebard, p. 2, 2004) and with advancements of railroads, the growth of cities and the influx of immigrants, people began to place more emphasis on connecting self-contained communities through journalism. This brought about the attention and focus on what should be taught, and the rules needed for teaching specific subjects (Kliebard, p. 3, 2004). Mental disciplinarian, Christian Wolf, claimed certain ways of teaching these subjects could further develop and strengthen the mind. As a result, there was a social transformation and a strong urgency for school reform.

Humanitarian Charles Eliot believed in the "power of intelligence and reasoning" (Kliebard, p.13, 2004). This humanitarian strongly claimed that "we Americans habitually underestimate the capacity of pupils (Kliebard, p.10, 2004). Eliot believed curriculum should not be different based on whether one was "preparing for college or life (Kliebard, p.10, 2004). He emphasized the importance of mental discipline throughout the learning trajectory.

As the population doubled to 14 million immigrants in the 1900's, it forced Americans to reflect and dig within as to what kind of role were these new inhabitants going to play in American society (Kliebard, p.11, 2004). Though industrialization played a strong role in the economic advancement of our nation, in 1913 however, factory inspector Helen M. Todd interviewed child laborers and they stated they rather work in factories than be in a classroom as

schools were “monotonous, cruel and humiliating. This brought to light the imperfections of a not very stable upcoming society. The issue became clear, curriculum was not seen as “appropriate to meet the new demands of an industrial society” (Kliebard, p. 6, 2004).

Psychologist, Edward Thorndike, brought about the concept of “restructure schooling due the changing social order. Due to the growing population at schools, education stakeholders felt an adjustment needed to be made in order to hold true to the culture and the socio-economic development of America.

As a result, developmentalist G. Stanley Hall focused primarily on the child study movement. “Careful observation and recording of children’s behavior at various stages of development” was essential to learning (Kliebard, p.11, 2004) and promoted “intellectual growth of the individual”. It is important to allow students opportunities of exploration regardless of their desire to go to college or not to acquire essential skills (Kliebard, p.12, 2004). With the rise in the industrial movement however, there was a heavy influence in the creation of institutions where the curriculum no longer focused on the mental cultivation of the individual but more on grouping students based on social class to promote “a democratic social living” (Ornstein C.B & Pajak, p. 6, 2007) in the quest to “remake America’s social attitude”.

The growth of immigrants in the United States created this progressivist movement to keep control and power, moving away from seeing education as an individual process and giving birth to educational reformer and zealot Joseph Mayer Rice. The reconstruction movement focused on the improvement and regulation of education (Ornstein C.B & Pajak, p. 6, 2007) as it was heavily emphasized by Rice and Lester Franklin Ward in that it will help all of society especially in providing equity. Rice and his socio-political agenda put blame on superintendents of schools stating they “lacked knowledge of pedagogy” (Kliebard, p.18, 2004).

Moreover, Lester Franklin Ward who had a strong influence in Social Darwinism, believed that human beings can intelligently overcome whatever inequalities that existed from wealth and power restating the importance of social progress (Kliebard, p.21, 2004). John Dewey's educational philosophy also influenced Ward taking away the essence of teaching the child as a whole and changed the focus to the child based on his/her socio-economic status.

The ongoing tension lies with the new incentive in listening to children voice their opinions and share their ideas versus micromanaging the learning environment. Society is starting to realize that individuals already come with their own intellect and can effectively add to the learning environment. The solution in creating a curriculum that produces an effective outcome is without a doubt the creation of more student-centered learning. Until we continue to ignore that individuals belong in the forefront of educational reform, the American curriculum will continue to patronize our moral values as a society, packaging us into government-controlled merchandise. America's students should not be put up for sale.

References

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