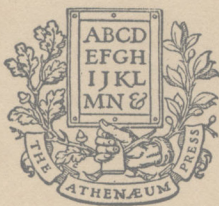


THE MAKING OF HIGH-SCHOOL CURRICULA

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PREFACE

Advanced and graduate students in the field of secondary education, together with high-school teachers engaged in revision of their courses, have made many inquiries about curriculum construction which showed the need for a book on this subject ; and these inquiries are used as the basis on which this text is constructed.

There is not a major point in the text about which inquiry has not been made by at least one student or teacher at some time during the past two and one-half years. Some of the problems discussed have been the subject of inquiry by dozens and scores of students and teachers.

It will be noted that whereas academic treatment characterizes some of the topics, a more direct and practical method of presentation is used for other topics. No apology need be made for such lack of uniformity in style other than to state that in so far as the author has the ability, abstractions and vague generalities have been reduced to concrete, definite, specific concepts in terms of real school situations. At all times the image of the high-school teacher confronted with

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the task of course revision has been in the forefront of the author's consciousness, and he has written for the purpose of trying to clear up some of the haze surrounding current discussions and procedure as to curriculum construction. Some of the problems and some of the techniques are in their very nature abstract; for the treatment of such, a less direct and applied mode of presentation has been necessary, although every effort has been made to secure clarity of expression.

That certain of the problems here under discussion cannot be settled with a greater degree of finality is, perhaps, regrettable. In the nature of the case, however, this must be so. The curriculum situation is one lacking in characteristics of stability and permanence as regards both the human factors and the knowledge factors involved in it. The highly tentative nature of the techniques advocated for handling the situation lends emphasis to its inherent characteristics. It does seem worth while, nevertheless, to attempt a statement of the various features of the problem and a clarification of the techniques now advocated, in order that a less disjointed and better coördinated attack may be made upon the problems involved.

For assistance in the study of these problems and in the organization as well as the presentation of the results, my obligations are many and my appreciation is

profound. The students in my seminars for two years have been searching out, evaluating, and recording materials, as have also for nearly the same length of time the students in an advanced course on high-school curricula; my colleagues in secondary education, Dr. G. A. Rice and Dr. C. B. Allen, have been urgent and insistent upon preparation of the material for publication; most valuable criticisms, corrections, and suggestions have been made by Dr. Melvin S. Lewis of the University of Indiana, affecting the treatment of job analysis as a technique; Mrs. Isobel Akers has spent many hours and much care in typing, re-typing, checking, and correcting the manuscript; Miss Elizabeth L. Bishop of the Santa Barbara State Teachers College labored long and diligently to prepare the original tabulation showing the development of thought about secondary-school curricula in the United States from the earliest days to the present time; the index is the work of Miss Faith E. Smith, formerly librarian of the Lange Branch of the University of California in Berkeley, now of the Division of Psychology and Philosophy in the Public Library of Los Angeles. For permission to quote from published and copyrighted material my obligations both to individuals and to publishers are duly acknowledged in footnotes at appropriate places.

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If the book shall come to have any use at all by school teachers and school administrators, it will be for the reason that these teachers, students, and colleagues have been constantly on the alert to discover and suggest concrete situations and practical material.

For errors, misstatements, misinterpretations, and such other faults as the critics may find, or the book possess, the co-workers are entirely blameless; all censure with any accompaniments thereof will be assumed by

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INTRODUCTION

Interest in the Problem

From the time when the high school in the United States first received judicial sanction as a legal institution through the decision rendered in the Kalamazoo case down to the present hour, an ever-recurrent problem for the executives and the staff has been to determine what shall be taught. Restricted by law, beset by parents, pestered by the pupils, commanded by higher institutions of learning, worried by their own theories and philosophy of education, the makers of courses and curricula have besought powers above and below to lead them out of the entangled meshes of the varied demands. The movement for reorganization of secondary education has given added force to the demands for a better program of studies, and the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century has presented the spectacle of the nation at work on the problem of what

shall be taught in the schools. Even the daily newspapers have conceded that the problem has news value, and they discuss it editorially as well as in the news columns. The question of what to teach in schools is of unquestioned importance.

Nature of the Problem

Almost from time immemorial there has seemed to exist an air of mystery, of sanctity, almost of mysticism, around subjects of study. For some reason or other, one field of knowledge has been sacredly set apart from another, and learning has been made a fetish to be worshipped. In silence, awe, and reverence the field of knowledge has been approached as if some magic essence or mysterious power lay concealed within a subject of study. Perhaps this is not to be wondered at in the light of the nature of that social institution which has served as the foster mother of learning throughout the long history of the race. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is a race-old mystery, and the play of knowledge upon men to make them as gods is an old and ever-recurrent theme. But the very irreverent and heretical present has become sceptical of the mystery behind the veil, insisting that nothing sacred or worshipful attaches to knowledge in the abstract, and that, in effect, human knowledge and fields of learning are

merely the record of human experiences, arbitrarily classified and tabulated and arranged for convenient purposes of reference by later generations at work on the eternal problem of adjustment between man and his world. Such expressions as "knowledge as such," "pure knowledge," "knowledge for knowledge' sake," and similar terms all make up a convenient hocus-pocus of the witch doctor and the medicine man with which to deepen and perpetuate academic and pedantic superstitions; but such phrases are gradually losing their potency to mystify, to cause wonder, or even to be impressive. The history of the race has shown that the survival of knowledge depends upon the degree to which it functions in the life of man, and hence that subjects of study possess value commensurate with the contributions they make to the major and minor problems of human welfare and race progress. The search for and arrangement of such knowledge, appropriate to adolescent life, is the problem of making programs of studies, curricula, and courses for the secondary schools.

Difficulties in the Way

Yet the discussions of the problem leave much to be desired. The professionals sometimes use a jargon utterly unintelligible to the lay citizen. On the other hand, lay opinion is based upon meager or obsolete

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data, is often prejudiced, and too often is narrow and limited in scope. The advocate of a fad, the leader of a cult, the devotee of a cause, and all the other exponents of small-group consciousness are having a gala time in parading before the public gaze a pet theory, a new scheme, or a novel plan, as a solution of the vexing problem of what the teaching material in schools shall be. So far the well-organized and dependable studies for high-school material have been carried on according to so many techniques and are so varied in the methods by which they are presented that evaluation of results in comparable forms is exceedingly difficult. The magnitude of the task tends to the development of inertia: because results cannot be secured immediately and applied at once, the tendency is to accept the status quo and let somebody else work out the answers to the questions involved. Among those who are carrying on reliable investigations there is a hesitancy to make results public for fear that accusations of premature and untested judgments will be brought against the work, or against the person conducting the investigation. But most of all, perhaps, there is a feeling of insecurity of technique in attacking the problem. The older techniques of procedure are largely discredited, the newer techniques are still in the period of trial; and even when the steps of the new techniques are known, there

is an unwillingness to commit one's personal reputation as an investigator to the care of this most uncertain leader, the unproved technique. It is also true that the various techniques are not matters of common knowledge and familiarity to the rank and file of the teaching force; and it is from this group of students of the problem that the most positive and valuable work can be secured. Teachers need orientation in the field of the problem, and a classification of modes of attack upon it.

New Demands

There is vastly more to the new freedom than a cleverly worded phrase. The youth movement is much more important than a topic for conventional resolutions. There is a new spirit abroad in the land today; and if the schools are to be held responsible for the development and interpretation of this new spirit as well as for its guidance into positive and constructive channels, then opportunity must be offered to those in charge of the schools to discover and make use of the new material which is itself a part of modern social life. Attempting to direct the youth of today by means of educative material appropriate to medieval or even to Victorian times is comparable to the reversion of military procedure to the use of knightly armor or of

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massed-infantry tactics. Out of the school itself, a new program of studies must appear, sponsored as well as determined by those who shall administer it, and appropriate to the new society and to the varied individuals in it. Patchwork will not do, mere adoption of majority practice will not do, neglect of practical demands will not do. A new set of specifications must be drawn up; for the plans have been radically changed. The needs of the present are greater than those of the past, and of a decidedly different character; and they are not only imperative but also persistent. The first really important question to settle is how best to go about drawing up the specifications and selecting the materials, — a question of determining technique and procedure.

Indefinite Status of Procedure

It is altogether certain that no summary of the techniques now in use for selecting, arranging, and administering instructional material in high schools will produce one technique, either by itself or in combination, which will be entirely satisfactory and completely usable. Like the social life of the times, the old standards and traditions have been discredited or abandoned and the formulation or determination of the new has not yet appeared. There is a vast deal of criticism and of fault-

finding, a minimum amount of constructive and positive thought, an almost negligible amount of clear and definite, well-organized statement. Stimulating and suggestive as the new ideas on curriculum construction are, energetic and positive as the advocates of the newer techniques appear to be, one sometimes despairs of ever collecting and arranging the suggestions, procedures, points of view, terminology, and the like which have grown up out of the minds and labors of curriculum-makers, past and present. The best that can be done is to attempt a clarification and simplification by stating in small compass the thinking that lies back of curriculum construction and by expressing concisely, with illustration where possible, the present-day formulation of that thought. It must be reiterated, however, that no one precise, definite, well-formulated technique for the making of high-school curricula has appeared; that is, there are techniques on trial, but not a finished technique for making high-school curricula.