

**The Changing
Curriculum - -**

The Changing Curriculum

BY

THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON CURRICULUM

EDITH BADER

ORVILLE G. BRIM

PRUDENCE CUTRIGHT

WILL FRENCH

HAROLD C. HAND

CHARLES W. KNUDSEN

ERNEST O. MELBY

PAUL T. RANKIN

LAURA ZIRBES

HENRY HARAP, *Chairman*



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PREFACE

The original project culminating in the publication of this volume was suggested in February, 1936, by a joint committee of the Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction and the Society for Curriculum Study which drew up a tentative outline. No sooner did the committee assemble for its first conference than it proceeded to demolish the original plan of the volume and substitute what it thought was a more dynamic presentation. This was promptly approved by the executive committees of the cooperating societies. The original framework was continuously revised up to the time of publication.

The Joint Committee held a series of five conferences for the planning and development of this volume. All the conferences were held in an atmosphere of comfort, friendliness, and geniality, but pleasantness did not dull the edge of criticism. Rarely did a group project have such a fine blending of practical and academic workers. The project developed uniformly happy personal relationships among the members of the working group. The two members of the committee on the Pacific Coast cooperated on Chapter I but attended only one of the five periodic conferences.

Since every member of the committee wrote with a knowledge of the contents of the whole volume, there are many evidences of a unified and coherent treatment despite the fact that the book was written by ten persons. The book could not have been organized or written without a large amount of group planning and discussion. The critical appraisal in the latter part of the book, in particular, could not have been

made without common acceptance of a basic point of view.

The early stages of the committee's deliberations were marked by unusual like-mindedness. The committee had hoped that it could present a volume with unsigned chapters representing the collective authorship of the committee. When differences arose in the application of the basic principles it was agreed to identify the individual contributions. Considering the freshness of thought reflected in the volume, the inconsistencies are few and of minor significance.

The purpose of the book as it was originally conceived was to make available an up-to-date summary of thought and practice. It would have been futile to hold this particularly energetic committee to a presentation of the *status quo*. The group agreed that orderly progress comes from transitional programs in which the participants have a clear conception of the ultimate goal. Mere change does not constitute progress; change must be in the direction of a social goal. The inquiry of the committee led to the acceptance of democratic living in all of its aspects as a goal toward which the school should move.

The first part of the book includes the theoretical bases of the curriculum and certain general aspects of planning for curriculum development. The second part consists of an appraisal of outstanding cases of curriculum development in state and county school systems, in city school systems, and in individual schools and classrooms.

A draft of the book was presented and criticized before its publication at the joint annual meetings of the coöperating societies. The critics who participated in the program of critical appraisal included: H. B. Bruner, Teachers College, Columbia University; George S. Counts, Teachers College, Columbia University; C. L. Cushman, Denver Public Schools; Julia Hahn, Public Schools, Washington, D. C.; Sidney Hall, State Superintendent, Richmond, Virginia;

Ernest Horn, State University of Iowa; William H. Kilpatrick, Teachers College, Columbia University; I. Jewell Simpson, Assistant State Superintendent, Baltimore, Maryland.

It is impossible to list all the persons and institutions who coöperated in various ways with individual members of the committee. Suffice it to say that the committee is grateful to the many school and college officials who assisted the committee in the many phases of the project. The enterprise had the continuous encouragement of H. L. Caswell, then chairman of the Executive Committee of the Society for Curriculum Study, and Rudolph D. Lindquist, then president of the Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction.

The committee does not assume that every individual or school will have the inclination or the readiness to follow the program which it proposes. It does maintain that it was its responsibility to set forth a point of view and a procedure based upon the assumption that it is the function of the school to improve living in a democratic society.

In a very real sense the committee wishes this volume to be regarded as a report of progress. It has described curriculum programs that are in the process of passing from the old into the new. The committee thinks it has gained a glimpse of the distant scene but it is certain that it will be necessary again and again to stop and get a sharper view of the goal that lies ahead. Modestly, it hopes, together with other major current enterprises, to contribute to the renaissance of publication education in America.

THE CHAIRMAN

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CHAPTER I

ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT STATUS IN CURRICULUM THINKING

CURRICULUM development is definitely and markedly on the increase, and interest in this movement is nationwide. To support this sweeping generalization the authors of this study present the facts of continued and increased efforts in curriculum-building on the part of city and state departments of education.

CONTINUED AND INCREASED EFFORTS IN CURRICULUM-BUILDING ¹

We will first consider various categories of evidence afforded by a recently concluded survey which included every city in the United States above 25,000 population and every tenth community below that size listed in the *Educational Directory* published by the Office of Education. Of the 648 heads of school systems approached in this study, 303, or somewhat less than half, returned usable replies. The cities thus responding included 201 above 25,000 in population, sixty of 15,000 to 25,000 inhabitants, and forty-two with less than 5,000 on their census rolls.

This survey revealed clearly that the problems of curriculum development are being attacked systematically along a widely spread front. Especially is this true of the larger communities. Organized curriculum-development programs are now under way in well over seven tenths of the cities of above

¹ Mr. Hand is the author of the sections entitled "Continued and Increased Efforts in Curriculum Building" and "Trends in Curriculum Thinking."

25,000 population, whereas slightly less than a half and exactly a third of the school systems serving communities of 5,000 to 25,000 and below 5,000, respectively, reported such enterprises. Moreover, less than one city in ten has ever conducted an organized curriculum-development program in the past without renewing its efforts along this line at the present time.

Increasing interest and effort in curriculum development are shown in the data of the following table.

PERCENTAGE OF CITIES REPORTING DATE OF BEGINNING OF
PRESENT CURRICULUM-DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN
WHICH THE PRESENT PROGRAM WAS BEGUN
IN CERTAIN YEARS ON EACH LEVEL

(Note. This study was made in December, 1936.)

<i>Date Present Program Was Begun</i>	<i>School Level</i>			
	<i>Elemen- tary</i>	<i>Junior High School</i>	<i>Senior High School</i>	<i>Junior College</i>
	(115) *	(74)	(76)	(9)
1935-1936, inclusive	54.8	52.7	57.9	55.6
1933-1934, inclusive	20.0	20.3	19.7	33.3
1931-1932, inclusive	12.2	13.5	11.8	0.0
1929-1930, inclusive	4.3	8.1	2.6	0.0
Before 1929	8.6	5.4	7.9	11.0

* The figures in parentheses indicate the number of cities reporting the year in which the present curriculum-development-program was begun.

Well over half of the curriculum programs on each school level whose dates of initiation are known were begun either in 1935 or 1936. Over seven tenths of these enterprises have been initiated since 1932. Only an approximate tenth on any school level were begun before 1929. Furthermore this rapidly increasing interest in curriculum development implies a growing willingness to come to grips with the manifold problems which it presents.

Two additional bits of data suggest increasing readiness "to do something about it." Of the seventy-one cities reporting the present employment of a director of curriculum, over seven tenths have created this office since 1931. Similarly, of the thirty-eight school systems in which outside curriculum consultants are engaged, nearly eight tenths have begun this practice since that date. Furthermore, of the approximately three hundred cities included in the survey only two reported the abolition of the office of director of curriculum, and only three indicated that the practice of employing outside curriculum consultants had been discontinued.

Additional evidence of an increasing interest in curriculum-building is almost everywhere afforded by the fact that state-wide programs of curriculum development—of widely varying degrees of magnitude, to be sure—are now under way in thirty-two states. By far the majority of these enterprises have been begun since 1930. Furthermore, to the informed observer it appears highly probable that the number of state departments of education sponsoring such programs will continue to increase.

TRENDS IN CURRICULUM THINKING

Recommendations for resolving the manifold problems of curriculum development will probably be meaningful and helpful only to the extent to which they are based upon a thoughtful consideration of the present status of "curriculum thinking" in the school systems of the country. There is only one point from which an attack on these problems can intelligently be begun in a given locality. This point, obviously, is largely defined by the nature of the views concerning curriculum problems which are held by the teachers, supervisors, and administrators in the community under consideration. Educators, like their pupils, must begin where they themselves are. Consequently, a volume on curriculum de-

velopment addressed to curriculum workers should take as one of its points of departure a careful scrutiny of the dominant trends in curriculum thinking now current in this country.

In consonance with this view, a form of inquiry was drawn up in December, 1936, and submitted to nearly 170 heads of school systems in cities in which programs of curriculum development were known to be under way. The inquiry form employed was in part based upon the descriptions of trends in curriculum practices recently gleaned by Zirbes, McCrory, and Porter from an analysis of educational magazines, curriculum yearbooks, and recently published professional books.² Approximately fifty pairs of statements descriptive of various points of view with reference to curriculum development as a generalized problem (that is, no statements were included which applied specifically to any particular school level or field of instruction) were thus placed in the hands of superintendents or curriculum directors in cities with programs of curriculum development under way with a request for an indication of the view current in their respective situations. On the assumption that differing or contradictory points of view concerning any given issue might be held by teachers on the different school levels in the same city, each respondent was requested to indicate the dominant position taken by staff members on each educational level.

Usable replies were received from nearly two thirds of all the cities thus canvassed. In all, thirty-six states were represented by one or more communities. The returns represented all education levels, including 106 elementary schools, ninety-three junior high schools, 100 senior high schools, and twenty-five junior colleges.

² Laura Zirbes, *Curriculum Trends: A Preliminary Report and a Challenge* (1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D. C., Association for Childhood Education, 1936).

The trends in curriculum thinking thus brought to light will be discussed below under the following headings: (1) the function of the curriculum, (2) the nature of the learning experience, (3) organization for curriculum development, (4) selecting and arranging curriculum materials, (5) installation, and (6) evaluation. No claim is made that these trends are characteristic of the country as a whole. Rather, they reflect what responsible and informed school officials in cities with working programs of curriculum revision believe to be the consensus of opinion among their faculty groups.

The Function of the Curriculum

A belief that educational theory and practice should be thoroughly in harmony with the social philosophy of democracy was reported as characteristic of all but a very small number of the more than three hundred teacher populations. This is not surprising in view of the long-postulated and oft-repeated declaration that the chief purpose of the school is to prepare good citizens.

There is apparently a rapidly growing conviction that the fundamental basis of the curriculum is to be found in experience and that school experiences should so far as possible be as broad as those of life itself. Practically all elementary, junior high-school, and senior high-school teachers subscribe to the view that the curriculum should afford experiences in all of the major social functions.

No more than six of the populations on any school level were typically of the opinion that the rôle of the school is to follow and that the social purpose of education is primarily to educate for adjustment to the status quo. On the contrary, there was reported a widespread acceptance of the view that the social purpose of education is to educate for the reconstruction of American life, through democratic

processes, along all lines implied in our democratic tradition, as well as to educate for necessary adjustments in a period of continuing and accelerating change.

3. A belief that the chief emphasis of the curriculum should be on life as it is being lived was held by only a few of the faculty populations. Far more popular was the position which postulates that the curriculum should also emphasize life as it is becoming and life as it should be lived under conditions of potential abundance to the end that such problems may be anticipated as the generation now growing up will probably encounter.

The teachers included in this study are apparently sensitive to the inconsistency of placing a primary emphasis on acquisitiveness and other individualistic tendencies in schools devoted to educating for life as it should be lived in an interdependent society such as ours unquestionably is. There is an overwhelming consensus in favor of a heavy stress on cooperation and other social tendencies.

It has been argued frequently and persuasively that public education cannot effectively discharge its obligations to society if it is made a cloistered enterprise remote from and indifferent to the realities of everyday life. Practically all elementary and secondary teachers subscribe to or incline toward the view that the school should come to grips with reality and that the pupil should be introduced to the strains, stresses, and tensions of contemporary life.

Another claim that has for some time been expressed with considerable force from lecture platforms and in the educational prints is that the school has allowed an unjustifiable emphasis upon mental development to the detriment of the social education of the pupil. If the findings of the present study may be regarded as indicative, it would appear that a great many teachers are not yet convinced of the validity of this indictment. No more than three fourths of the total

number of faculty groups on any school level typically incline toward the view that the major emphasis of the curriculum should be on the social education of the child rather than on his mental development. 4

Culture has frequently been viewed as a body of content handed down from the remote past with a few time-honored disciplines regarded as its reservoir and the teachers in these favored fields as its guardians. In this study there was reported an overwhelming consensus in harmony with the belief that the truly cultured person is one who is intelligently and adequately "at home" in all of the actual life situations in which he finds himself. This supports the view that all the broad fields of the curriculum are vitally concerned with culture. 5

Virtually every one who is sensitive to the fact of continuing social change and who believes that the school curriculum should be kept abreast of societal and individual needs is convinced that curriculum revision is of necessity a continuous process. Practically all of the teacher groups on all school levels, save that of the junior college, were in essential agreement that the curriculum must continuously be revised. 6

The Nature of the Learning Experience

It is urged in many quarters that learning should be regarded as that inclusive development necessary to meet and control life-situations adequately and that, in consequence, the learning experiences provided for by the school should be in the nature of real enterprises which call for the exercise of maximal self-direction, assumption of responsibility, creative thinking, planning, and exercise of choice in terms of desired life values. Nearly all faculty groups on all school levels subscribe to or strongly incline toward this point of view. There was practically no support for the contrary view 1

that learning should be regarded as the ability to give back or to demonstrate upon demand certain phrases, formulas, skills, etc., which had been memorized or acquired.

It is also persuasively argued that the pupil should be regarded as an active agent who can be educated only through his own self-activity rather than as so much passive raw material awaiting the manipulation of the teacher. If the findings of this study are to be trusted, however, some missionary work remains to be done before this view gains the universal acceptance which its validity merits. Only slightly more than eight tenths of the faculty groups on each level were believed to be favorably inclined toward this point of view.

If it is true that the pupil can be educated only through his own self-activity, it is obvious that numerous and varied interesting and meaningful "things for students to do" must in large part replace the former heavy reliance on verbalism ("talking about" or "preaching to") if the school is to educate effectively. A vast majority of the teacher groups included in the present study are apparently convinced of the validity of this argument.

A conviction that pupil self-activity should be substituted for verbalism wherever and whenever possible logically leads to a repudiation of the belief that students can "learn life" vicariously within the classroom. It is, therefore, consistent with the view that the four walls of the school must be "stretched" to include numerous and varied experiences in or with factories, farms, slums, picket lines, libraries, community planning groups, welfare agencies, recreation centers, shops, newspapers, stores, pressure groups, legislative bodies, etc. In other words, this point of view postulates that in order to know life the pupil must experience it. This position represents the consensus of opinion in nearly all of the faculty groups on each of the three lower school levels.