

Key reports on teaching and learning at the turn of the century

We shall be forever oscillating between extremes: now lending ourselves with enthusiasm to the introduction of art and music and manual training because they give vitality to the school work and relief to the child; now querulously complaining of the evil results reached, and insisting with all positiveness upon the return of good old days when reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic were adequately taught.

John Dewey (1901)

1892-3 -- Committee of Ten

The modern academic subjects should be made equal in status to the classical curriculum and should be equally acceptable for the purposes of college admission. (Through offering of four different curricular programs: Classical, Latin-scientific, Modern languages, English)

1899 – Committee on College-Entrance Requirements

All students should take a set of ‘constants’ (4 years of language, 2 of math, 2 of English, 1 of history, 1 of science) and then “free electives.”

1905-6 – Commission on Industrial and Technical Education

There is general agreement between the “broader-minded students of education” and those “men and women who have been brought into intimate contact with the harder side of life” that the “old fashioned” curriculum of Massachusetts’s schools was too far removed from the demands of life created by an industrial society and that in practical trade training lay the answer.

1918 – Cardinal Principals of Secondary Education

Main objective of high school education should be: 1. Health, 2. Command of fundamental processes. 3. Worthy home-membership. 4. Vocation. 5. Citizenship. 6. Worthy use of leisure. 7. Ethical character. Curricula should be differentiated based on future vocational interests such as agricultural, business, clerical, industrial, fine arts, and household arts.... Provisions should also be made for those having distinctively academic interests and needs.

Selective “timeline” of debates in education
(From D. Ravitch, The troubled crusade, 1983)

1920's-30's -- Curriculum Revision Movement

Supported “core courses” blending English and social studies etc.
These courses focused on personal and social development and dealt with problems such as how to get along with others, how to be a good consumer. Revisionists took pride in the reduction of the number of students in college prep tracks

1938 -- Dewey criticized extreme progressivism in Education and Experience.

1944 – Education for all American youth (NEA) Curriculum should be organized to meet the needs of youth. “There is no aristocracy of ‘subjects’ ... Mathematics and mechanics, art and agriculture, history and homemaking are all peers.”

1945 – “Prosser Resolution” sparked the movement for “life adjustment education” – an education that would prepare all students for everyday life and work.

Critiques of progressive education take hold: And madly teach (Mortimer Smith, 1949); progressivism was a “doctrine that released the teacher from his responsibility for handing on the traditional knowledge of the race, a doctrine that firmly implied that one need not adhere to any standards of knowledge but simply cater to individual interests...”

1950's -- Educational wastelands (Arthur Bestor) Quackery in the Public Schools, (Albert Lynd); Let’s talk sense about our public schools, (Paul Woodring)

Projects by disciplinary specialists to develop curriculum in mathematics and science begin. They hope to replace “telling” and student recitation with curriculum packages that use discovery and inquiry as methods of learning. Emphasize key concepts over coverage; rejected single textbooks, etc. and sought to enable students to learn how mathematicians, social scientists, etc. think.

1955 – Progressive Education Association goes out of business.

1957 – launch of Sputnik

1958 -- The pursuit of excellence. (Rockefeller Brothers Fund, John Gardner). Advocates the development of human potential as a national goal.

1959 -- The American high school today. (J. B. Conant). Urges spread of comprehensive high school: providing a good general education for all, offering noncollege bound students elective nonacademic courses,

providing academically talented students with advanced courses, and having no senior class smaller than a hundred.

1960 – Summerhill, (A.S. Neill) The child is “innately wise and realistic. If left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as he is capable of developing.”

1965 – Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Emphasizes needs of the disadvantaged, focuses on compensatory programs and use of schools to redress problems of society.

1967 –Renewed attacks on public education as one of the failed institutions of society: Death at an early age. (J. Kozol); 36 children (H. Kohl). Deschooling society (I. Illich)Etc.

J. Featherston reports on British infant schools, and their focus on the development of the individual child and helps to launch the “open education movement.” (Supported by work at EDC and Shady Hill)

1970 – Crisis in the classroom. (C. Silberman). “Schools are grim, joyless places, oppressive and petty... much of what is taught is not worth remembering.” (P. 247). Suggested that the answer was in the English primary schools, and in informal or open education.

1974 – “Why open education died” (D. Myers). Concerns that open education fails to recognize the need to provide some structure, emphasize the 3 r’s, or balance intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

1976 – Congressional review of MACOS; critiques of “new math” etc. as impractical, inappropriate for the values and experiences of parents and teachers.

1983 – A nation at risk (National Commission on Excellence).

4 views of teaching and learning at the turn of the Century (From H. Kliebard, The struggle for the American curriculum)

Humanists

(Eliot, Committee of Ten)

Every subject should be taught in the same way and to the same extent to every pupil so long as he pursues it, no matter what the destination of the pupil may be.

The right selection of subjects along with the right way of teaching them could develop citizens of all classes endowed in accordance with the humanist ideal –with the power of reason, sensitivity to beauty, and high moral character.

Eliot: “Preparation for life should be preparation for college”

“There has been too much reliance on the principle of authority, too little on the progressive persistent appeal to reason... and no amount of memoriter study of languages or of the natural sciences and no attainments in arithmetic will protect a man or woman.. From succumbing the first plausible delusion or sophism he or she may encounter”

Thoughtful students of the psychology of adolescence “will refuse to believe that the American public intends to have its children sorted before their teens into clerks watchmakers, lithographers, telegraph operators, masons, teamsters, farm laborers, and so forth, and treated differently in their schools according to those prophecies of their appropriate life careers. Who are to make these prophecies?”

To those who pointed to great individual variation in “natural endowment” Eliot argued “Americans habitually underestimate the capacity of pupils at almost every stage of education...”

Developmentalists

(G. Stanley Hall...):

The natural order of development in the child is the most significant and scientifically defensible basis for determining what should be taught.

All students should not be taught in the same way to the same extent regardless of probable destination.

Hall: Preparation for college is not preparation for life

The Contents of Children’s Minds (1893) –
If we knew what children’s minds contained, we could educate them more effectively... We presume that children know too much, when, in fact, many Boston school-children do not know what a cow, or hill, or island is.

Schools have to take into account the fact that there are great armies of incapables, shading down to those who should be in schools for dullards or subnormal children.”

Social efficiency educators

(J. M. Rice; J. F. Bobbitt)

Sought to create an efficient smoothly running society and applied the standardized techniques of industry to the business of schooling... so that schools could better prepare students for the roles they would later occupy...

Bobbitt: "Education is primarily for adult life not child life".

'The first step in curriculum-making is to decide what specific educational results are to be produced....

From The Curriculum. "Human life, however, varied consists in the performance of specific activities. Education that prepares for life is one that prepares definitely and adequately for these specific activities.... This requires only that one go out into the world of affairs and discover the particulars of which these affairs consist. These will show the abilities, attitudes, habits, appreciations, and the forms of knowledge that men need. These will be the objectives of the curriculum...The curriculum will then be that series of experiences which children and youth must have by way of attaining those objectives."

Work up the raw material into that finished product for which it is best adapted. Applied to education this means: Educate the individual according to his capabilities. This requires that the materials of the curriculum be sufficiently various to meet the needs of every class of individuals in the community; and that the course of training and study be sufficiently flexible that the individual can be given just the things that he needs.

Social Meliorists

(L. F. Ward; A. Small)

Cultural capital can be distributed properly through education; and education can correct social injustice

Argued against the idea that history can train the faculty called judgement, mathematics the faculty called reasoning, and so on as if powers of the mind existed as isolated entities and as if intelligence itself were somehow separated from the rest of existence.

Small: (on the Committee of Ten): Their report is "a classified catalogue of subjects... and provides no sense of education as a whole." It's an "unorganized procession of pedantic abstractions" that serve to make us think of subjects as independent bodies instead of parts of one reality."

Knowledge alone is not sufficient. Educators should be "makers of society. Sociology knows no means for the amelioration or reform of society more radical than those of which teachers hold the leverage."

When teachers begin to recognize and accept their social function, rather than thinking of themselves merely as providing "tonics for various kinds of mental impotence" they will begin to fulfill their vital role in making a better future."

"The proper educator is reality, not conventional abstractions from reality."

The center of education should be the student

"Education connotes the evolution of the whole personality not merely of intelligence."