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LOOKING BACK: A PROLOGUE TO CURRICULUM STUDIES

CURRICULUM THEORIZING AND DEVELOPMENT ARE AS old as educating institutions because any educational program must have a content. Although theorists and practitioners have (perhaps without conscious awareness) dealt with curriculum questions since at least the time of Plato's design for education in his ideal state, the notion of curriculum as a professional or scholarly field is recent. Historically, curriculum decisions were largely left to that small, usually elite, portion of the public most directly concerned with the operation of schools. In the United States, curriculum began to emerge as a field of scholarly inquiry and professional practice only toward the close of the 19th century, a time that roughly coincided with the rise of public schooling for the masses.

The burgeoning population of the public schools at the dawn of the 20th century was only one of a number of tumultuous and consequential developments in American life. One result of all this upheaval was the Progressive movement, a broad-based effort aimed at assuring the realization of American ideals in an increasingly urban-industrial and pluralistic nation (Cremin, 1964, pp. 8-10). Thus, the first self-conscious curriculum scholars saw their work as part of this broader reformation of American life. The responses of the Progressive educational reformers were to institutionalize many of the now characteristic features of school curriculum, including such practices as tracking, standardized testing, and civic education (Tyack, 1974).

Although early curriculum specialists frequently perceived themselves as "Progressives," these educational reformers, like their fellow Progressives in politics and other fields, worked with diverse, even contradictory, conceptions of what "Progressive" meant (see Curti, 1959;

Kliebard, 1995; Lagemann, 2000). Thus, from its earliest days, the curriculum field has been characterized by vigorous disagreements about its proper aims and practices. For example, the various meanings assigned by curriculum specialists to terms such as "learning" and "democracy" are not merely esoteric concerns without consequences for the world of practice. To the contrary, how one defines terms to a great extent determines the resulting character of education.

The first set of readings we introduce includes four of the seminal early formulations of the curriculum field: the work of Franklin Bobbitt, John Dewey, Jane Addams, and George S. Counts. Each of these formulations retains an important contemporary presence in curriculum scholarship (see Eisner, 2002). In this sense, conflicting conceptions of curriculum have never been an aberration in the field. On the contrary, differing views have been present since the very first generation of curriculum scholarship. Indeed, the work of the first two early curriculum scholars we will encounter, Franklin Bobbitt and John Dewey, exemplify how different archetypes of the meaning of "curriculum" result in radically different views of educational aims and practice.

When he wrote *The Curriculum* (1918), Bobbitt was a professor at the University of Chicago as well as a sought-after curriculum consultant to school districts across the nation. He is an apt starting point for tracing the development of professional curriculum scholarship and practice in the United States, as the essentials of his approach to curriculum have been dominant in practice ever since. Moreover, Bobbitt was a self-proclaimed pioneer of the field. He asserts in the excerpt reproduced in this volume to be writing the "first" curriculum textbook. Although it is not self-evident what constitutes the "first" curriculum textbook, Bobbitt's claim is often conceded. In any case, there is no doubt that Bobbitt's *The Curriculum* has had enduring influence, particularly in its insistence that curriculum developers begin with the identification of proper goals. "Pioneer" implies finding one's way in unfamiliar terrain, but Bobbitt seems to have had few doubts that he was headed in the right direction. He epitomized the "can-do" attitude of the new professional elites of the Progressive era, a time when professionals in a variety of fields were increasingly considered the preferred means by which a forward-looking society addressed its problems. Bobbitt was quite sure of what ailed curriculum making: For too long it had been in the hands of amateurs, and it was high time it became a professional undertaking.

Bobbitt was convinced that professional knowledge applicable to curriculum work could be found in the logic of "scientific management," which had been applied to raising worker productivity in industry (Callahan, 1962, pp. 79-94). In a nutshell, Bobbitt believed that curriculum work, like work in industry, should be managed in the interests of efficiency and the elimination of waste. These same interests, after all (it seemed obvious to Bobbitt and many of his contemporaries), in significant respects accounted for the world preeminence of United States manufacturing industry. Use of the same methods would bring the same world-class standards to the school curriculum.

Bobbitt's claim that curriculum work was out of date, having not kept pace with other advances in schooling, is almost poignant. *The Curriculum* was Bobbitt's solution to this unfortunate state of affairs. As he makes plain in the preface, he proposed to lay out how curriculum can be constructed in a manner that honors scientific procedures. For Bobbitt, "scientific" suggested a systematic series of procedures, carried out by curriculum professionals, prior to implementation in a school district (see Eisner, 1985).

"Professional"

"Scientific management"

"Efficiency"

The content of any given curriculum, according to Bobbitt, could be "discovered" by a process of surveying what successful adults know and can do (Bobbitt, this volume). In turn, the results of this process of discovery would be used to formulate educational objectives from which the curriculum scope and sequence (i.e., what is taught and in what order) would be derived to address where students fell short of successful adults. After instruction with this kind of curriculum, he believed, students would be prepared to lead successful lives in their adult years.

Efficiency, of course, suggests not only smooth operating procedures but minimization of "waste" as well. Thus, in addition to scientific curriculum making, Bobbitt wanted to minimize sources of wasted instructional time. He believed that diagnostic testing and other procedures proposed by behavioral psychologists such as Edward L. Thorndike would make possible prediction of the kind of errors students typically made. This would enable more efficient curriculum making as well as prevent unnecessary time being spent on the costly business of instruction, especially grade-level retention of students, which Bobbitt considered enormously wasteful. As in industrial enterprises, Bobbitt wanted to maximize output (i.e., student learning) at minimum cost (i.e., paying teachers).

This outlook also held significance for the content of the curriculum. Bobbitt believed that "the shortcomings of children and men" in subjects such as spelling and grammar were "obvious," and hence these fields needed to be included in the curriculum. It was less apparent to Bobbitt, however, what shortcomings were overcome by "social" subjects such as literature, history, and geography. He urged attention to identifying significant educational objectives to which these social subjects could contribute (Bobbitt, this volume).

Because Bobbitt's approach to curriculum work was based, he argued, on a dispassionate analysis of what youngsters needed to lead productive lives as adults, he dismissed arguments about the interests of children as irrelevant to the educational process. Moreover, Bobbitt did not question whether the existing social and economic order was just; he merely took that for granted. Hence, he saw the aim of schooling as matching individuals with the existing social and economic order (Lagemann, 2000, p. 107).

As the version of "My Pedagogic Creed," this volume shows Dewey's view of curriculum provides a vivid contrast with Bobbitt's. Although at different times both Dewey and Bobbitt served on the faculty of the University of Chicago, the contrasts between the two men are more revealing than their similarities. Bobbitt believed curriculum work was a practical task whose only need for theoretical justification had been "discovered" analyzing the behavior of successful adults. Although Dewey had founded and directed the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, he spent most of his professional life as a philosophy professor at Columbia University. And while he was also involved with the more practice-oriented world of Columbia's Teachers College, Dewey's greatest interest in problem solving was in the world of ideas, not in the mechanics of consulting in school districts about curriculum development. This by no means suggests, however, that Dewey lacked concern about the consequences for education raised by the work of Bobbitt and other adherents of "scientific" Progressivism.

Dewey recognized only too well that, if one accepted Bobbitt's premises about relevant subject matter, meaningful learning, desirable social arrangements, and so forth, then Bobbitt's industrial metaphor for curriculum development followed in a disarmingly straightforward manner. Dewey, however, emphatically rejected Bobbitt's premises. Where Bobbitt argued that adult society is the mold for the school curriculum, Dewey (this

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volume) said such a view "results in subordinating the freedom of the individual to a pre-conceived social and political status." "True education," Dewey insisted, "comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself." Similarly, Bobbitt's reliance on behaviorist methods to Dewey signified external imposition whose effects "cannot truly be called educative." Indeed, Dewey pointed out the worth of subject matter could only be determined by its educational uses. For example, along with Bobbitt, Dewey (this volume) questioned the value of history as a school subject if it was the customary "inert" study of "the distant past." But Dewey maintained history "becomes full of meaning" if "taken as the record of man's social life and progress . . . as the child is introduced . . . directly into social life."

The distinctions Dewey drew, although consequential, are frequently subtle. While Bobbitt spoke in familiar language, Dewey spoke the less-familiar language of reform, of education as a means of extending and reforming democratic, community life in the United States. The relative novelty of his language and views may help explain why Dewey's theory of curriculum has been often and widely misunderstood, even by those purporting to be his followers. In this regard, he wrote *Experience and Education* (1938) toward the end of his career because he believed, for example, his insistence on curriculum planning beginning with the experience of the child was being wrongly interpreted as disdain for the "progressive organization of subject-matter." Similarly, Dewey emphasized that starting with the experience of the child, far from producing laissez-faire classroom arrangements, increased rather than replaced the demands on judgment by the teacher in directing each pupil's learning toward worthwhile goals.

What would Dewey's ideal curriculum look like in practice? Although too lengthy a question to answer fully here, probably the most authentic answer can be obtained by examination of the Laboratory School Dewey established and oversaw during his years at the University of Chicago (see Mayhew and Edwards, 1966; Tanner, 1997). In broad terms, Dewey's curriculum broke down the barriers, customary in schools a century ago as well as today, between children's life experiences and their experiences in the classroom. Hence, the heart of the curriculum would be activities based on a simplification of "existing social life." In this scheme of things, boundaries between traditional school subjects would be traversed. Children might, for example, examine how the local community deals with its problems and, in this context, develop measuring skills ordinarily assigned to mathematics, drawing skills ordinarily assigned to art, map skills ordinarily assigned to geography, and so forth. The logical organization of school subjects, Dewey insisted, was the organizational schema of adults; children require the "psychological" organization of subject matter, moving gradually toward adult modes of understanding associated with formal school subjects.

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* In sum, the school, for Dewey, was an integral part of community life; it was also an instrument for social reform. Whereas Bobbitt saw the school as an agent of social reproduction, Dewey (this volume) portrayed "the school as the primary and most effective interest of social progress and reform." Just as there should be no strict boundary between the curriculum and community life, Dewey believed the curriculum held the potential for society to remake itself.

Jane Addams, friend and collaborator of Dewey, also saw no sharp boundary between the curriculum and democratic community life. In 1889 Addams and her longtime associate, Helen Gates Starr, established a social settlement, Hull House, in Chicago's West Side

slums. While Dewey's curriculum thought was mainly directed at formal schooling, the primary site of Addams's work was Hull House and its adjacent community. As Richard Bernstein (1967) observed, while Dewey brought "the theory and methods of social philosophy to bear on the concrete facts," Hull House "provided him with the 'facts'" (p. 37). Moreover, as Ellen Condliffe Lagemann (1994) has noted, Addams's location outside of the academy "enabled her to develop and sustain an approach to social analysis that was broad, synthetic, and problem- as opposed to discipline- or profession-centered" (p. xiii).

Hull House reached out to immigrants, to laborers, to mothers and children, to all in an urban-industrial community who needed or wanted its educational and social programs. Celebrated almost from the beginning, Hull House aimed through its educational programs to address the range of problems and aspirations of ordinary and needy people in an era when public schools often appeared inadequate to the task. Although Addams wrote and spoke widely about education, she considered these activities no substitute for the direct caring she saw as necessary (Noddings, 2001, p. 184). As Addams wrote in her autobiographical *Twenty Years at Hull House*, first published in 1910, she believed she was filling educational needs that were otherwise either unrecognized or unmet:

It sometimes seems that the men of substantial scholarship were content to leave to the charlatan the teaching of those things which deeply concern the welfare of mankind. . . . A settlement soon discovers that simple people are interested in large and vital subjects. . . . (Addams, 1961, p. 282)

Hull House strove to value both the traditions immigrants brought to the United States and necessary adjustments to their new environment. "The ignorant teacher," Addams (this volume) wrote, "cuts [immigrant children] off" from their parents and their parents' traditions, while "the cultivated teacher fastens them because his own mind is open to the charm and beauty of that old-country life." It is therefore not surprising that Addams understood that a one-size-fits-all curriculum to "Americanize" immigrants may not fit the needs of any individual. Coercion was not part of her stock in trade.

Rather, through provision of choice and individualization, the extraordinary breadth of Hull House curricular offerings aimed to both expand student horizons and connect to their aspirations and needs. But these ambitious goals were as far as possible harmonized with the community. Courses were offered in cooking, arithmetic, history, athletics, clay modeling, English for Italians, and many other subject matters. As well, classes were offered on writers such as Dante, Browning, and Shakespeare, and a Plato club and Dewey lecturing on social psychology were made available to "groups consisting largely of people from the immediate neighborhood" (Addams, this volume). Although fully supportive of the exceptional community member who was college-bound, more fundamentally Hull House aimed to "connect him with all sorts of people by his ability to understand them as well by his power to supplement their present surroundings with the historic background" (Addams, 1961, pp. 284-285).

Since at least Addams's time, great significance and considerable disagreement has been attached to the connection of cultural pluralism and the school curriculum. The educational program enacted at Hull House in this regard has always held the potential to inform discussion of this issue. Its curriculum modeled how to foster intergenerational

and intercultural communication, open-minded and balanced debate, and the relationship of education to community betterment. As Nel Noddings (2001) writes:

Life at Hull House was proof that people could cooperate, actually live together, despite differences of religion, nationality and economic status. There were no ideological tests at Hull House beyond the common commitment to improve the neighborhood, Chicago and, more generally, the lives of working people. (p. 185)

If building a more humane and democratic society was integral to Dewey's and Addams's theories of curriculum, it was almost the singular goal of George S. Counts. From the time of his earliest, major works in the 1920s, Counts was concerned with the injustices of democracy and capitalism in the United States, particularly as they played out in the context of schooling (see Kliebard, 1995, pp. 158–159). Like Dewey, Counts grew increasingly restive with "child-centered," Progressive educators who appeared to be ignoring the social context of education in the business-dominated atmosphere of the 1920s. For Counts, the seemingly dominant stream of Progressive education spoke to the "needs" of the child as though these had meaning outside of the society in which education unfolded.

Social Reconstructionism
The catastrophic economic slump of the 1930s ushered in a much more receptive environment for the disenchanted intellectual critics of the business civilization of the 1920s. American social thought became more polarized, and collectivist thought enjoyed possibly its most widespread popularity in the history of the United States (see Bowers, 1969). Counts (this volume) caught the spirit of the times when he remarked in *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (1932) that "the so-called 'practical' men of our generation—the politicians, the financiers, the industrialists"—had acted selfishly and bungled the well-being of Americans. Counts appealed for teachers to lead the schools and the public "for social regeneration." For Counts and his fellow social reconstructionists, several of the most prominent of whom such as Harold Rugg were Counts' colleagues at Teachers College, Columbia University, it seemed apparent that the age of collectivism had arrived.

Aspects of Counts' vision of a regulated and directed economy in order to serve more than society's elite were, of course, consistent with the more radical elements of the New Deal yet to come. Indeed, it is a sign of how Counts was in touch with the times that later some of his main ideas were to find their parallels in the words and policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the early New Deal years. Nevertheless, given what he viewed as the failure of individualism in American life, Counts looked to school curriculum as a place to inculcate collectivist ideas. Counts maintained that all school programs already inculcated ideas, but those ideas had been ones that primarily served the interests of the ruling classes. As Counts (this volume) put it, "the real question is not whether imposition will take place, but rather from what source it will come."

Counts's theory of curriculum found a ready audience during the depths of the Great Depression in the early 1930s. For example, he and his colleague, the historian Charles A. Beard, were dominant forces in the Commission on the Social Studies, which had been established by the American Historical Association to make recommendations for the schools. The commission's reports, although stopping short of formulating an actual curriculum, nonetheless leaned heavily toward an activist-oriented social studies curriculum consonant with the tenets of social reconstructionism. Furthermore, beginning in the 1920s, Rugg oversaw the development of social studies curriculum materials that were based to some extent on social

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reconstructionist principles. In contrast to most available materials, their explicit focus was on the problems of American life (see Thornton, 2001). Rugg's materials became bestsellers and were widely adopted across the United States. This is all the more remarkable given the economic hard times faced by school districts during the 1930s.

Rugg's social studies materials probably mark the greatest success of the social reconstructionists in the implementation of their ideas in school programs. As the Great Depression and the New Deal waned, however, Rugg's textbooks came under growing fire from conservative groups. For this and other reasons, the series eventually fell out of favor. Almost the same fate befell social reconstructionism itself as the 1930s wore on and World War II approached. Conservative criticism and the changing climate of educational opinion increasingly shifted Counts and other social reconstructionists from at or near the center of educational debate to a more peripheral position (Kliebard, 1995, pp. 176–178). Nevertheless, the flame of social reconstructionism in educational thought was never entirely extinguished and was, as we shall see, visible again in the 1970s and after.

Before leaving Counts, however, it should be noted that his view of curriculum attracted criticism not only from educational and political traditionalists. No less a progressive figure than Dewey, while sympathizing with some of Counts's collectivist goals, found parts of Counts's curriculum thinking worrisome. For example, Dewey always championed teaching students to think for themselves. From this perspective, the preordained ends of Counts's "imposition" seemed hard to distinguish from indoctrination.

To round out this first section, we have included a well-known essay by curriculum historian Herbert M. Kliebard (1975) dealing with the early years of the curriculum field. Kliebard's focus is the influence of "scientific" curriculum making. Although we have already noted that the scientific strain of curriculum thought has tended to be dominant ever since the field's inception, Kliebard places it in historical context, pointing out how "scientific" approaches to curriculum and other educational matters have come to pervade educational thought and practice in the United States.

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