

Curriculum Development:

Leaders and Movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century

Susan Van Alstyne

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Dr. Amerman

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### **Abstract**

The movements and leaders of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century formed the basis of many of the present day education practices. The following paper will briefly analyze the Kliebard chapter *The struggle for the American curriculum, 1893-1958* (2004), which describes the four major movements and the leaders of curriculum development. Movements will include humanism, developmentalism, and scientific efficiency often referred to as “Taylorism,” and social meliorism. This brief analysis will explore how the theories influence the modern day education system, and if the current education system comprises some elements from the major movements or one in particular.

## **Societal Influence**

### **Industrialization**

The shift from farming communities to urban cities necessitated changes to the early 1800s teacher-centric education practices to a more organized system. Improvements in the rail system and different forms of communication such as newspapers and magazines changed the family life, employment, and society overall with simultaneous challenges in American education. One of the main products of industrialization is the McGuffey series of textbooks popular in the early to mid-1800s. Based on the many external changes, educators of the time were striving for standardization of the curriculum. For example, William Harvey Wells, the Chicago superintendent of schools from 1856 to 1864 created grade levels with a specialized curriculum to each grade (Kliebard, 2014, p.2).

The developments were not always popular with educators and students. Influenced by the Yale faculty report in 1828, which details how the mind is a muscle, by the late 1890s the curriculum literally implemented rote exercises for this muscle, which perhaps left no room for independent thought and creativity. By 1900s as Kliebard's example of the children who would rather work in a factory than be subject to the monotonous and sometimes cruel experiences at school (2014, p.6).

The demand for education continues to increase and multiply in the late 1890s to early 1900s. Attendance in secondary school or high school was at an all-time high. Lack of employment opportunities is one of the main reasons for the increase in the demand for high-school education. A skilled and more educated workforce is also in demand. There was a need to provide for specialized training.

The National Education Association Committee of Ten formed in 1892 with the original purpose to manage college entrance requirements, was now making recommendations about secondary school curriculum.

### **Humanists**

Humanists believe in the innate power of the individual to reason. Charles W. Eliot, then president of Harvard University, was appointed the chair of the National Education Association's Committee of Ten. Eliot was a visionary, and although he was a "mental disciplinarian" (2014, p.9), Eliot realized the curriculum did not include the essential part of education—reasoning power. Eliot believed it was crucial for students to express their thoughts. Opposition following the publication of Eliot's and the Committee of Ten report was the impetus for the next movement in curriculum development.

### **Developmentalists**

The developmentalists believe child development is the basis to determine the curriculum. G. Stanley Hall led the child-study movement. Hall's criticism of the Committee of Ten brought attention to the faults of the education system and the need to learn more about human development. Hall was an innovator, and the current educational system is rooted in some of his beliefs, such as the flexibility or adapting the curriculum to different populations and specializations based on person's needs and personal interests.

The Committee of Ten was becoming more and more irrelevant as the years progressed. Subjects that the Committee recommended for general education courses were not regarded as courses for college-bound high school students regardless if the student plans to attend college or not. Despite opposition from other leaders in the field, the Committee still recommended the same liberal arts education for all students. In 1895, a new committee formed, the Committee of

Fifteen led by the United States Commissioner of Education, William Torrey Harris, to focus on elementary education. Although Harris was a humanist, he did not share the same views as Eliot, but Harris believed the importance of the “five windows of the soul”—grammar, literature and art, math, history, and geography in the curriculum. Harris also criticized the child study teams.

### **European Influence and Emergence of Social Efficiency model**

A group of American educators who studied in Germany formed the National Herbert Society, named after German philosopher, Johann Friedrich Herbart. John Dewey was part of this group, also known as the “Herbartarians.” The Herbartarians had a more scientific approach to education. Harris was a vocal critic of the Herbartarians, and in 1895 an explosive meeting with each other was the beginning of a new order (2004, p. 17). Joseph Mayer Rice researched and observed classes and analyzed the existing system. Many of his published articles were combined in the 1912 book *Scientific Management in Education*.

### **Social Efficiency**

The social efficiency theorists apply scientific management principles and an efficient, focused curriculum for students to follow a path based on their skill set with testing as one method of evaluation. The social efficiency theorists thought “eliminating waste” would be helpful in creating a more productive society. As discussed in class, this model applies “Taylorism” to education and views curriculum as a way for students to learn the most in the least amount of time (Kridel, 2010).

### **Social Meliorists**

The Social Meliorists led by Frank Ward believed in the power of education and its influence on society. The meliorist movement was a response to the inequalities of race and gender as well as the abuse of power. The curriculum will reflect how students to influence

social change would apply the material. The meliorist theory is how the curriculum will influence change, more of a bigger picture view than the developmentalists.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Modern day schools are based on the infrastructure developed during 1860 through 1925. To manage and drive change in the education system, it is important to understand and study the foundation of the education system we know today. For instance, the introduction of general education courses during curriculum development, and creating the instruments to measure student performance such as grades. During the pivotal years in history with the Industrial Revolution, the Stock Market Crash of 1929, transportation and communication changed society with a direct impact on the education system. Community colleges or “Junior Colleges” developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, technology has completely changed education such as online classes (Davidson, 2017).

### References

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