

Curriculum Struggles

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## **Introduction**

Kliebard (2004) highlights the curriculum struggles in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century attempting to break away from the deeply rooted mental discipline approach spearheaded by German psychologist, Christian Wolff. Wolff's form of curriculum focused on the mind being used as a muscle, placing great emphasis on monotony and repetition within the classroom setting. As a result of this mental discipline, many scholars were left unemployed and unprepared for the demands of the workforce. The need for change evoked four interest groups: Humanists, Developmentalists, Social Efficiency Educators, and Social Meliorists. Opposing views between these interest groups led to curriculum struggle; decisions regarding what schools should teach became a turbulent era across the nation throughout the centuries.

## **Tension Between Four Interest Groups**

Humanists, Developmentalists, Social Efficiency Educators, and Social Meliorists were four interest groups that exhibited entrenched resistance to improve curriculum by varying dispositions. Societal shifts reciprocated a need for ongoing adjustments within the school setting. The expansion of railroads, influx of immigrants, and the profound growth in journalism and print contributed to social transformation (Kliebard, 2004). Contrasting ideas generated debate between the four interest groups throughout the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In retrospect, each interest group sought education reform in an attempt to reshape the curriculum as a whole to meet the growing demands of society.

## **Humanists**

Charles W. Eliot was a representative of the Humanist approach. This lens placed importance on the social development of the child becoming a model citizen. Accounting for

cultural aspects of western traditions, the Humanist approach concentrated on liberal arts subjects to prepare all students for achieving success and college readiness.

### **Developmentalists**

In contrast, G. Stanley Hall and his group supported the Child-Study Movement, this group was known as the Developmentalists. Opposing Eliot's approach, Hall placed a great deal of importance on the student's psychological development. Kliebard (2004) notes that when Hall assessed the curriculum posed by The Committee of Ten, not all students were capable of attending college. Therefore, Developmentalists consider the stages of development, and the individual needs of the learner are underscored. This overarching curriculum design is contoured to the personal needs of each individual student.

### **Social Efficiency Educators**

Social Efficiency was coined by Joseph Mayer Rice. This approach opposed the Developmentalist approach, as these trendsetters aimed to account for the surrounding social conditions when educating the whole child. Kliebard (2004) underlines how Social Efficiency Educators place emphasis on preparing students for the workforce to meet the growing demands of the global economy using scientific data collection; in doing so, Rice believed a lot of waste could be eliminated. Social Efficiency Educators believe in order for a person to play an integral role in society, he/she must be prepared to specialize in the developing innovations of the world by incorporating standardized techniques in the education sector.

### **Meliorists**

Lester Frank Ward was the vanguard for Social Meliorists, who felt that education should be the vehicle to correct the injustices that occurred in society. Kliebard (2004) notes that Meliorists utilize curriculum to educate students on how to overcome obstacles of corruption and

inequalities with peace and productivity. This interest group rooted its restructuring of education reform through policy change and problem-solving skills. Emphasis was placed on establishing a transformative mindset to bring about social justice with education.

### **Conclusion**

The remnants of the curriculum tug-of-war between the Humanists, Developmentalists, Social Efficiency Educations, and Social Meliorists resulted in no one singular interest group dominating the rest. Instead, each left a level of influence which can be incorporated into curriculum. Kliebard (2004) asserts that national shifts in social and economic trends, alliances, and local conditions affect the ability of these groups to influence school practice as time progresses. In the ever-changing society we live in, schools must follow suit; therefore, shifts in curriculum are inevitable to meet the indispensable needs of humanity.

**Resources**

Kliebard, H. M. (2004). *The struggle for the American curriculum, 1893-1958*. Routledge.