

The Hillsdale Program

A New American Curriculum
For the Twenty-First Century

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Initial Draft by Samuel L. Blumenfeld

Preface

At the foundation of every school or school system is a philosophy of education. You cannot have a school without one, whether it is articulated or not, for in operating a school or a school system many decisions have to be made: what to teach, how to teach it, what books to use, how students should dress, what form of discipline to apply, what role parents should play, what role, if any, the government should play, how the school should be governed, how it should be financed, etc.

The philosophy that presently governs American public education is the "progressive" one formulated early in this century by John Dewey and his colleagues. They viewed education primarily as a process of socialization, an instrument for social change which the educators could use to reform or transform society. Their aim was quite revolutionary: to change America from a capitalist, individualistic, believing society into a socialist, collectivist, humanist or atheist society. The process entailed destroying the old order so that a new one could be built in its place.

During the first four decades of this century all of public education was transformed to permit the schools to carry out the mandates of the progressive philosophy. The curriculum was radically changed and teaching methods altered. Intensive, systematic phonics, the traditional way of teaching reading, was replaced by look-say, an ideographic, whole-word methodology; cursive writing in the first grade was replaced by print script; rote learning of arithmetic was discarded and the subject disappeared into mathematics; geography and history were ground up into a value-laden concoction called social studies.

Even classroom furniture and decoration were changed. Immoveable desks gave way to moveable desks, chairs, tables, floor mats, hassocks, and bean bags. Pictures of George Washington were replaced by pictures of animals, Mickey Mouse, and other cartoon characters. New schools were built without classroom walls to enhance social interchange. And as socialization was encouraged, classroom discipline went out the window. What was once called cheating was now known as "cooperative learning." And, of course, dress codes were abandoned in favor of freedom from traditional rules and regulations.

Thus, what we have today in our public schools is the result of numerous decisions made in conformity with a well-articulated, painstakingly conceived, and deliberately implemented philosophy of education. In other words, all of the insoluble problems we have in public education today, are not the result of drift, accident, or ignorance, but are the inevitable consequences of a failed philosophy.

At the foundation of this failed philosophy are several important doctrines: (1) There is no God, no supernatural power that created the universe; therefore, if there is no God to obey, there is no sin. (2) Man is a product of evolution, an animal, descendant from other animals, with no hope of life after death. (3) The purpose of life is self-fulfillment or self-actualization, and the pursuit of the "good life" is the end all of existence. (4) There are no absolutes in morality; ethics are situational. (5) Evil is caused by ignorance, poverty and social injustice; thus if you want to get rid of evil you must get rid of its societal causes. (6) Man is not innately depraved or sinful; his moral behavior is the result of environmental influences and education.

Probably the best summaries of the philosophy that undergirds American education today can be found in John Dewey's "My Pedagogic Creed" and in the two Humanist Manifestos. Dewey's Creed is one of the most forthright statements in favor of collectivism to be found anywhere, and the two Humanist manifestos provide the basic content of a catechism for the religion of secular humanism. All three documents spell out what has become the entire program of public education, and virtually everything that goes on in a public school today is derived from these doctrines and tenets.

The reason why public education cannot be truly reformed is because no one in the education establishment, the federal or state governments, or the business community is willing to admit that such a philosophy exists and is the chief obstacle to excellence. In addition, there is a real communications gap between the educators

and the public. What the educators mean by "excellence" is not what the public means by that word. What the educators mean by "critical thinking" is not what the public thinks it means.

"Restructuring" is another term that is bandied about by educational reformers. A hint of what it means was given in Education Update, January 1990, published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. According to the article "restructuring" entails "breaking free from the time-dictated standard of the Carnegie unit," that is, moving from a credit system to "performance-based standards." To do so, schools will use "such means as holistic reading and writing assessments, independent studies, interdisciplinary projects, problem-solving labs, and a senior thesis."

In other words, "restructuring" is the means whereby the educators will be able to obliterate all remaining vestiges of traditional education without destroying the school and their careers! Anyone who thinks that academic excellence will result from that witless progressive recipe, is, as the saying goes, whistling in Dixie.

And so, as long as the progressives and humanists control what is taught in American schools, there will be no real academic improvement, and excellence will continue to be sacrificed on the utopian altar of socialization.

But need it continue to be that way? Is there any reason why the progressives and humanists should have an exclusive monopoly on curriculum development in America? Who gave them that privileged

position? Who gave them the power to dictate what is taught in every public school? Who gave them the mandate to destroy reading instruction, arithmetic, history, traditional values and morality? Who gave them the right to carry out their plan?

We did. How? By default. By abandoning the field, giving them our children, acquiescing to "progress." Yes, there were voices in the wind warning of calamity and tragedy to come. But the progressives and humanists were clever enough to take full control of the institutions of power, and that permitted them to carry out their plans and finance them abundantly with the taxpayers' money.

True, their experiments began in private institutions financed by private foundations. But once they gained control of the public financing mechanism, they were assured of ultimate success. The result has been the totalitarianization of public education. Indeed, attempts by conservatives to introduce intensive phonics, arithmetic drill, or books that promote traditional morality have been met with hostility and ridicule. Such attempts are dubbed the work of reactionaries, right-wing extremists, censors, book burners, John Birchers, religious fanatics, etc.

But need it continue that way? Need the vast majority of parents and taxpayers accept for all time and forever the intolerant dictates of a progressive elite, self-chosen, self-anointed, and self-elected to decide what all American children are to be taught?

Of course not. It is still within the power of the American

American people to change all of that. But to do so requires formulating a new philosophy of education on which to build a new American education system for the 21st century.

What kind of philosophy is needed to raise American education to the level of excellence the American people want? To find out, one must ask some very basic, simple questions: What is the purpose of education? What do parents want when they send their children to school?

A New Philosophy of Education

We believe that the purpose of education is to pass on to the younger generation the knowledge, wisdom and values of the older generation.

In other words, education is a function of child rearing and is conducted by parents and teachers to enable their children to become moral, productive, independent members of a free society able to pursue rewarding, satisfying careers and to raise families of their own.

True education creates a bridge between generations, not a chasm, not a gap. What better way is there to show love for one's children than by passing on to them a heritage of knowledge, wisdom and moral values?

A New American Curriculum

So what do we teach? What is the new curriculum?

We begin with knowledge. The first step in the process of formal instruction is to provide the child with the tools of learning, the academic skills needed to pursue knowledge. We call these tools the three R's: reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Reading

For reading we teach intensive, systematic phonics so that the child will master the mechanics of alphabetic reading and become a fluent, proficient, accurate, phonetic reader. There are three steps in teaching a child to read an alphabetic writing system. In step one the child is taught to recognize the letters of the alphabet. In step two the child is taught the sounds the letters stand for. For centuries this was done in a very simple, mechanical way by drilling the child in consonant-vowel combinations, such as ba, be, bi, bo, bu or ma, me, mi, mo, mu, etc. The purpose of the drill was to make sure that the child developed an automatic association between letters and sounds. When this was accomplished, the child then moved on to step three, reading words, sentences and stories, sounding out new, unknown words.

The methodology has its variants, but the essential, pivotal skill to develop is the automatic association between letters and sounds. Ours is an alphabetic writing system. An alphabet is a set of graphic symbols -- we call them letters -- that stand for the irreducible sounds of the language. In English we use an alphabet of 26 letters to stand for 44 irreducible sounds.

The reason for this shortage of letters goes back to the Roman conquest of Britain. The Romans imposed their Latin alphabet on

on the people who lived there, and the people adapted the Latin alphabet to their own needs. Thus 26 letters were made to represent 44 sounds. As a result, in English, some of our letters stand for more than one sound, and some sounds are represented by more than one letter. In addition, some of our sounds are represented by more than one spelling form. That is why a systematic, logical, intensive approach to teaching the English alphabetic system produces the best results.

One should teach alphabetic reading as directly and intensively as possible. While pictures, gimmicks and games are often used, they are not necessary and are often distracting. Children teach themselves to speak their own language virtually from birth so that by the time they are ready to learn to read they have developed a speaking vocabulary in the thousands of words. And they do so without the use of pictures, gimmicks, games or Sesame Street. Children are natural, serious, efficient, no-nonsense self teachers and learners and do not need pictures, gimmicks and games to learn to read if they are taught correctly.

And that is the purpose of the New American Curriculum: to provide correct, proper, efficient, logical instruction in order to enable children to achieve the desired competency.

Our aim is to help children develop into accurate, precise, fluent readers, able to decipher the words they are reading and understand them. But there is a certain natural order in learning to master an alphabetic system. Mastering the mechanics of alphabetic reading must precede comprehension, for how can you comprehend what you can't read?

Once the child has mastered the mechanics of reading, he or she then moves into the learning of language: why English words are spelled as they are, what they mean, the expansion of vocabulary, the enjoyment of literature, the uses of language. Language is the tool of thought. It is the instrument whereby the brain expands its powers to conceptualize and analyze. It is the instrument that creates a culture and a civilization.

Writing

The New Curriculum requires teaching cursive writing in the first grade, eliminating the prevailing form of instruction that starts with print-script which is supposed to, but doesn't always, lead to cursive. Cursive -- or connective and flowing -- writing is the easiest, most efficient, and most comfortable form of writing. It is a skill the child will be using for the rest of his or her life. Therefore, it is worth taking the time in the first grade to teach it and for the child to learn it.

The reason why it is bad to begin formal writing instruction with print-script is because you force the child to acquire habits of holding the writing instrument and forming letters which then must be discarded if he or she is to become a good cursive writer. No child should be required to develop habits which then must be broken so that new habits can be acquired. The task for the child is simply too great and often causes resentment and resistance. Expecting the child to develop and perfect two diametrically opposed sets of writing habits is not only unrealistic but educationally unsound. And that is why millions of children never learn cursive

and continue printing for the rest of their lives.

Cursive is easy to learn, for it consists of only three basic pen movements: the overcurve and the undercurve, both of which originate in the oval, and the push-pull, or up and down, slant stroke. Children love to write cursive and will perfect their penmanship if given the opportunity and time to do so in the classroom. In teaching cursive writing, teacher supervision is most important, for it is the teacher who shows the child how to hold the pen correctly, how to tilt the paper at the proper angle, and how to form the letters.

The first grade is where the teacher has the time to do all of this. That is why proper cursive writing instruction in the first grade is a requirement of the New Curriculum.

As for learning to print, that can come later in poster making and art class.

Arithmetic

In the New Curriculum arithmetic is restored to its important place in primary education, for without a proficient skill in arithmetic the child in later years will be unable to handle the more difficult aspects of mathematics let alone balance a checking account, add up figures on a supermarket check-out slip, or figure out interest on a car loan.

What is arithmetic? Arithmetic is simply the art of counting. All arithmetic functions (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) are merely different ways of counting. In addition we

count forward. In subtraction we count backward. In multiplication we count in multiples, which is merely a faster way of counting forward when dealing with great quantities. In division, the same principle is applied in the reverse direction.

Our ten-symbol, place-value arithmetic system is one of the greatest inventions of the human mind. But it requires memorization for its efficient use. And rote learning is the fastest, most efficient way of committing arithmetic facts to memorization and automaticity.

This means that children can learn to do arithmetic with relative ease, provided they are taught the proper techniques of memorization. Our arithmetic system provides many built-in aids to memorization: recurring number patterns, the ease in learning to count by ones, twos, fives and tens, etc.

A young person proficient in arithmetic will have full confidence in later using a cash register, a calculator, or a computer, for he will have developed a computer in his head as his prime check on mechanical error and accuracy.

Beyond the Primary Grades

As the child advances beyond the primary grades, he or she will be honing and perfecting the tools of learning acquired in those first years. Reading leads into the great world of literature. The library becomes a treasure house of knowledge and intellectual delight. Writing leads into developing a good writing style, learning how to express difficult thoughts in clear language,

expanding one's vocabulary, investigating the origins of words, etc. The structure of the language is learned by studying grammar, and the study of a second language and Latin helps one to understand the special characteristics of one's own language. All of these studies are important ingredients in the development of high literacy.

These two foundational skills -- reading and writing -- will be used in learning all of the subject matter the student will be required to take: history, geography, economics, the physical sciences, government, mathematics, etc.

In the New Curriculum each course must contain a body of knowledge that provides a basic understanding of and insight into our culture and civilization. The notion that all of these separate bodies of knowledge can be indiscriminately ground up into a senseless hodgepodge, a tasteless sausage, called "social studies" is one that must be totally and completely repudiated. We must restore to formal schooling a logical order to the knowledge we wish to impart to our children -- knowledge of the world, of the past, of how wealth is created, how nations are governed, etc.

Each subject will require a good syllabus, course outline, and appropriate books. Books do not necessarily mean textbooks. Most of the latter make very dull reading. It may be better to require selected readings that provide the knowledge we want to impart in an interesting narrative form. In any case, we now have an opportunity to explore all of the means available to make education a true reflection of all that makes life the remarkable journey that it is.

Wisdom

How do you impart it? Wisdom is acquired through knowledge, experience, understanding, and suffering. But we don't want our children to have to suffer to gain wisdom. History, biography and autobiography are probably the best sources of wisdom for our purpose. We can study the lives of others and learn much from their mistakes and their successes. We can learn from the sufferings they endured. But suffering alone does not produce wisdom, for wisdom is the power to use good judgment, to choose the soundest course of action based on knowledge and understanding.

The public schools are telling children that their best protection against AIDS is a condom. Wisdom would tell them that their best protection is abstinence -- not only against AIDS, but other venereal diseases, unwanted pregnancy, emotional upheavals, unwed parenthood, abortion, etc. But wisdom has no place in the public school.

Book Selection

And wisdom must guide parents and teachers in deciding what books are to be read by the students during their formal education. Book selection is more than a matter of taste. It's a matter of values. What do you want your children to get out of the books you require them to read? On their own, they will read whatever they wish. But, under your tutelage, would you prefer that they read a novel about middle-class neurotics (Catcher in the Rye), or one about a feeble-minded murderer (Of Mice and Men), or the inspiring autobiography of a young Christian who spent twenty years

in Castro's prisons and survived by dint of his spiritual strength
(Against All Hope)?

You must judge the books on their value as educational tools in the light of your philosophy of education, not someone else's. You are not telling your children that they may not read Catcher in the Rye or Of Mice and Men on their own. You are simply requiring them to read what you consider to be of importance and value to you. You have a right to do so. After all, you are paying for their education!

The progressives know which books to choose: books by neurotics, degenerates, unbelievers. We should choose books that reflect the moral, the heroic, the productive, the courageous in man's life. And there are plenty of good authors to choose from: C. S. Lewis, Malcolm Muggeridge, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Charles Dickens, R. L. Stevenson, etc. Let the children get a taste of truly good literature so that they will be able to judge the quality of modern trash.

The most important task in developing the new curriculum will be selecting the books the children will be required to read.

Values

Values, of course, are inseparable from wisdom. Can one have wisdom without values? The values we must impart in our new curriculum are derived from our Judeo-Christian heritage, the Bible. If values are inseparable from wisdom, they are also inseparable from morality. By teaching the Bible we teach Judeo-Christian

values and morality. The Bible, therefore, should be a central text of instruction in our new curriculum. It should be read for what it teaches us about God, man, the covenant between them, the purpose of life, the destiny of mankind.

The Bible is also a perfect introduction to history. R. J. Rushdoony has written:

"When we study history, we must recognize that the Bible is the only infallible history book: it is the word of God. All other history books are fallible, often in error, and subject to continual revision or replacement in terms of further study and research. The Bible thus is our key textbook to an understanding of history."

It is also our key source of moral wisdom.

Dr. Rushdoony writes: (T)he Bible gives us the history of man since creation, his revolt against God and God's redemptive activity to reestablish man in the covenant. . . .

"(H)istory is thus not only the story of the rise and fall of man and of his civilizations in terms of this continual testing, but it is the struggle of two powerful forces to dominate history . . . the Kingdom of God versus the Kingdom of Satan." (World History Notes)

Thus, history is not merely a chronology of past events. It is a powerful spiritual value that conveys meaning to life, illuminates man's struggle against the forces of darkness within and outside himself, and reveals human experience in its full range of circumstances.

Cultural Values

It is also the object of the new curriculum, based on our educational philosophy, to use the school building itself as a means of conveying cultural values. How shall the rooms and hallways be decorated? Shall we cover the walls with imbecilic cartoons, or hang reproductions of great paintings, prints, portraits of the Founding Fathers, inventors, poets, explorers, composers, etc.? Shall we hang framed replicas of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in the classrooms or pictures of rock musicians and video stars? We can teach a great deal by what we display on the walls and help develop a taste for the fine arts.

One of the great values of our culture is classical music and there is no better place in which to introduce children to good music than the third-grade classroom. This can be done by playing some of the better known short orchestral compositions on a cassette player, and giving the names of the composers. Since children these days are exposed to heavy doses of rock 'n' roll, heavy metal, and other loud noises, they ought to be encouraged to develop a taste for good music that will turn them into the concertgoers of tomorrow. A rich heritage of glorious, uplifting, delightful music is denied millions of American children because neither their parents nor their schools care. We do.

A dress code is also essential if the school's atmosphere is to reflect serious purpose. Nothing is less conducive to academic work than slovenly dress, a gypsy-tent atmosphere in which all manner of

of clothes is permitted. For many students in the public schools personal dress has become the symbol of rebellion and defiance. That may be justifiable in a public school which itself is in rebellion against traditional values. But in a school which is meant to be a bridge between generations, a dress code is a sign of respect for the education process and the values it conveys.

Uniform comfortable dress enhances school discipline, eliminates competition by fashion, encourages neatness, saves money, and permits easy identification of outsiders. It also creates school pride as students identify themselves with an institution held in high regard by the community.

Foundational Tenets

If we decide that the true purpose of education is to pass on to the next generation the knowledge, wisdom and values of the previous generation, then it becomes implicit that undergirding our philosophy of education are these important tenets: (1) God created the universe and created man in his image. (2) Man disobeyed God, choosing to determine what is good or evil for himself, thus taking on the burden of sin. As the old New England Primer states: "In Adam's fall we sinned all." (3) Man's sinful nature requires that he know God's law, as imparted in the Bible, and obey it if he is to lead a happy, productive and long life.

Once we accept our new philosophy of education, it becomes fairly easy to make the many decisions that must be made in devising a curriculum, selecting books, and running a school.

Can this philosophy of education be accepted by most Americans? We believe it can, for most Americans believe in God and adhere to our Judeo-Christian traditions and values. What's more, it will give us what we supposedly want: a moral, literate, competent, productive, freedom-loving younger generation.

Implementation

And how shall our new philosophy and new curriculum be implemented? Just as humanists first implemented their philosophy of education in private institutions, so will we have to do likewise. A philosophy of education which uses the Bible as its foundation will be seen as an establishment of religion if adopted by a public school. Never mind that humanism is a religion and is openly promulgated in the public schools. Never mind that humanism is the philosophical foundation of the public school curriculum, thus making the public schools an illegal establishment of religion. The vehement opposition of the liberals, progressives and humanists to this threat to their monopoly will make it unlikely that our new philosophy of education will be accepted.

The dilemma posed by the establishment of religion issue should make Americans see the folly and impracticality of a government education system that creates an insurmountable obstacle to excellence and permits the promulgation of atheism with its destructive amoral ethos while excluding Biblical values and morality. The only solution to this dilemma is for the state governments to divest themselves of their schools and colleges and

transform them into private institutions.

But regardless of whether or not privatization takes place, there is no reason why the progressives and humanists should have a permanent monopoly on curriculum development in America.

The time has come for a new American curriculum based on a new Biblically inspired philosophy of education. And this is where we begin.

January 1990

Postscript

The above draft does not pretend to include everything that the new curriculum will offer. For example, the new curriculum must also include physical training, sports, typing, computer education, and a wide range of extracurricular activities. Training in the use of video cameras and television production should also be considered. The younger generation is the television generation, and they must understand the technology if they are not to be manipulated and/or victimized by it. The media will play an ever larger role in the lives of the younger generation, and a new curriculum must take all of this into account.