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EDUCATIONAL AIMS, IDEALS, AND ACTIVITIES

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Aims precede the curriculum. Alike in the organized writings of educators and in the changing conceptions of unorganized educational opinion, fundamental changes in the curriculum occur only after fundamental modifications of the aims of education have been discovered. Among the writers, Plato described the qualities of the perfect warrior guardian of the state before determining upon his education; Comenius presents the aims of virtue, piety, and learning before prescribing the curriculums of his systems of education; and Rousseau justifies his course of study by appeal to certain pre-formed assumptions concerning "the nature" of the child. Likewise, in the fluid movement of thought of the present generation when the curriculum of our times is in the making, we find that only after such aims as social efficiency have been subjected to prolonged discussion, do changes in the curriculum begin to occur.

This precedence of aims over subject matter is a necessity for purposes of selection and use. Because the information which youth inherits is beyond his powers of complete assimilation, selection must be made and a line must be drawn between the more useful and the less useful. And since selection is based upon value, educational aims must first be formulated. Moreover, since the functions of subject matter must be taught (for to present facts without an acquaintance with the uses to which they are to be put is futile) in the last analysis the use of any individual fact must be derived from the central aims of the whole system of education. So, for both selection and use the aims of education must precede the construction of the curriculum.

But though in all the educational classics, the writers have begun with the statement of aim, none has been able logically to derive an adequate curriculum from his aim. In every case there has been a mental leap from the aim to the subject matter, with no adequate principles to guide in the selection of material. This may seem to be a sweeping statement but a few illustrations will demonstrate its accuracy. In Plato's *Republic*, the author states his aim as follows: "Then in our judgment the man whose natural gifts promise to make him a perfect guardian of the state will be philosophical, high-spirited, swift-footed, and strong." Proceeding he says, "This then will be the original character of our guardians. But in what way shall we rear and educate them?" And answers his query as follows: "What then is the education to be? Perhaps we could hardly find a better than that which the experience of the past has already discovered, which consists, I believe, in gymnastics for the body, and music for the mind." He then proceeds to analyze gymnastics and music and argues for the inclusion of narratives, fables, and poetry in his course in music, which present certain proper ideals in the proper form, and of the proper types of melodies and songs. In his course in gymnastics he mentions little of the content but devotes his attention to the ideals of temperance, hardness, and health of body.

But this line of reasoning leaves much to be settled. Can the philosophical disposition be best trained through music? What parts of censored literature are to be selected? What gymnastic exercises are to be included in the curriculum? When the warrior has exercised in the gymnasium is he adequately trained for war or does he need some additional curriculum not mentioned by Plato?

This curriculum is not an adequate system of instruction for warriors. Within the last few years we have seen "a million men spring to arms," "high-spirited and strong," but they were not soldiers. Before they became the perfect guardians of the state their curriculum came to include much besides fables and poetry, melodies and songs. They had to learn to march, to shoot, to thrust with the bayonet, to fight in aeroplanes, and to sail the seas. Nor for the warriors of ancient Athens, who needed much specific training in the field and camp before they could perform

the acts of protection or aggression mentioned incidentally in the arguments of the *Republic*, was Plato's curriculum adequate.

The aims and curriculums of Comenius present the same insufficiency. This great educator assumes the aims of education to be to bring to maturity the seeds of learning, virtue, and piety implanted within us by nature. He then outlines his course for the vernacular school as follows (after Quick): "In this school the children should learn—first, to read and write the mother-tongue *well*, both with writing and printing letters; second, to compose grammatically; third, to cipher; fourth, to measure and weigh; fifth, to sing, at first popular airs, then from music; sixth, to say by heart sacred psalms and hymns; seventh, catechism, Bible history, and texts; eighth, moral rules with examples; ninth, economics and politics, as far as they could be understood; tenth, general history of the world; eleventh, figure of the earth and motion of the stars, etc., physics and geography, especially of native land; twelfth, general knowledge of arts and handicrafts."

Comenius sets up a threefold aim—learning, virtue, and piety. If we consider learning first, and ask whether it is possible to learn everything, the answer must be negative. Even though the *Orbis Pictus* was supposed to be a compendium of all knowledge, the compiler selected a few facts from the total mass. But when we ask for the basis of selection of facts no answer can be given. So far as the aim of learning is concerned with the selection it provides no criterion. Learning is learning and one fact is as good as another. If, however, we say that virtue and piety are the subsidiary aims which determine what facts should be learned we are still without a basis of selection. Will ciphering, or singing, or economics assist in any peculiarly valuable way to promote these two ends? Or, to carry the question further, what details of ciphering or economics will be most valuable in promoting virtue and piety? None, since one is as virtuous as another. Obviously, subject matter cannot be derived from learning of virtue and piety.

The impossibility of deriving subject matter from these aims is due to the fact that they are ideals isolated from activities. A virtuous carpenter does not perform the same actions, nor meet the same problems as a virtuous cook. A pious blacksmith receives a different education from that of a pious doctor. A virtuous and pious Chinaman thinks and acts on different matters

from those which engage the attention of a virtuous and pious American. The ideals are the same; the lives are widely different. It would be futile to teach a Chinaman the same curriculum as an American unless the intention were to Americanize him.

The curriculum is derived from both ideals and activities. Virtue, swift-footedness, piety, or social efficiency must be set up in a system of education; but in order to select the material to which these shall apply it is absolutely essential for the teacher to know the activities, problems, thoughts, or needs in connection with which these ideals are to operate.

Plato had a golden opportunity to set a new style in curriculum construction when he posited the perfect warrior as his ideal. If, instead of resting content with an enumeration of his qualities, he had analyzed the duties of the soldier, made what we call a job analysis, and had decided to teach swift-footedness, strength, high spirit, and the philosophic mind *through* these activities, he would have most profoundly influenced the education of two thousand years. But when he had stated his aim, he slipped back into the rut of the traditional subjects of his day as the best means of developing his aims. If, in like manner, Comenius had inquired into the activities of the French or English citizenry, had found out the important daily problems they had to meet and then had sought to make them virtuous and pious in their performance of these, he would have had a curriculum of demonstrable validity. He would then have known what ciphering, or economics, or political science, what music, sacred songs, and Biblical passages to learn. In other words, he would have been able to determine not only what subjects but what parts of subjects to include in his curriculum.

Ideals are both goals and standards. As goals, good taste, virtue, health, eloquence, and completeness of life are expressions of valuable ends for which men reach and whose attainment spells satisfaction. Discover the ideals of a nation and the trend of its action is known. As standards, ideals are arbiters of actions. One action may be discarded because it does not promote the ideals, while another may be accepted or modified because its performance leads toward the goals. But no man who sets ideals as goals is able to build his life in a vacuum and order his actions to suit his plans. He is born into a social group in situations over

which he has no original control. He is confronted by the actions of other men actuated by different ideals. Thrown into one situation he develops a set of actions different from those he would have had in another. With both his situation and his ideals in mind he is compelled to perform actions whose character is determined by both the ideals and the situation. Instead of possessing ideals and inventing a situation which will further them, it is more nearly accurate to say that he starts with situations and modifies them so as to realize his ideals as fully as circumstances will permit.

For this reason the curriculum by which he is trained to perform the important activities of the group in accordance with the highest ideals is necessarily based upon both activities and ideals. And obviously any aim of education expressed only in terms of ideals must fail to function.

Today the same procedure is necessary if the curriculum is to be modified intelligently. We suffer from the failure to distinguish between ideals and activities in the current aim of social efficiency. On some occasions we think of it as social efficiency, as an ideal in the sense that ideals of social service are advocated. But on other occasions we think of the activities carried on by those who are socially efficient, such activities as voting, beautification of the city, and the observance of community health regulations. And the result has been that only spasmodically and incompletely have we been able to modify the curriculum. What should be done by those who advocate social efficiency as the aim of education is to determine, first, the ideals of socially efficient individuals; second, the fundamental physical and mental activities carried on by people in the United States; and third, by a process of laborious analysis to discover exactly what important specific activities shall be taught and what ideals shall control in the performance of each. Until the objectives of education are broken up into these two elements it will be impossible to make an adequate reorganization.