

useful meanings than does other subject matter. Some may be better utilized by learners when they are of a certain age or have had certain experiences in their background or have certain purposes.

In Conclusion

Practices in selecting and organizing curriculum content may well be judged by the extent to which they reflect concern for an over-all objective of developing thinking-feeling-acting people—

people who have facts to think with or know where to get them; people who are doers; people who have good feelings to make their thinking and acting humane. Subject matter, processes, approaches, feelings—the curriculum always contains some of all of these but it takes deliberate planning to capitalize on this wide range of content. A broad view of curriculum content helps to ensure learnings of high quality.

ARTHUR W. FOSHAY

Choice of Content

This article examines two assertions about the nature of man, to illustrate a way of thinking about the choice of curriculum content.

I WANT to tell you of the process I went through in developing the present article. It represents, I think, a transition from one level of thinking to another that many of us will have to struggle with as we try to raise the level of importance of our thinking about the significance of the content we choose for the curriculum.

My first outline for this article had headings like these:

- What limits choice?
 - among children:
 - interests
 - perceptions
 - maturity of various kinds
 - among teachers:
 - personal experience and knowledge
 - materials and other resources
 - in the school's social context:
 - the prevailing local opinion concern-

- ing the place and function of the school
- public stereotype of teaching method
- public notion of acceptable behavior by teachers and children
- in the school:
 - sequence—how content is related to child's past; to his future
 - balance of learning: firsthand and vicarious; self and non-self; skill, understanding, conceptualizing.

Now, this isn't a bad outline. There are fresh things that might be said under some of these headings, and an article written from them would be understandably organized. But there are two things wrong with the outline: it doesn't allow me to say what is uppermost in my mind, and many of the readers of such an article probably could write it better than I. As it hap-

pens, I recently came to the conclusion that a rather large proportion of the readers of *Educational Leadership* write for educational periodicals themselves. I had a feeling, however, that the real difficulty with the outline was that it allowed me only to patch up what exists, when something more fundamental can be said about choice of content.

What seems more fundamental is this: *any content selected for serious consideration in the curriculum amounts to an assertion about the nature of Man*. By what we encourage children to do and to avoid, we guide them toward what we think they ought to become. Let's not pretend that we don't finally choose content, even though we maintain a supportive classroom climate and constantly involve children—as we certainly must—in the act of choice. If the choice we make is adequate, or inspiring, it is because we portray through it an adequate, or inspiring version of the nature of Man. If the choice of content should be called narrow, skill-dominated, "minimum-standardized," it is because we imply through it a narrow, mechanistic, standardized version of the nature of Man.

What is thrilling about the ideals of Progressive Education is the vision of children as fellow human beings, rather than as cups to be filled or abstractions to be intellectualized about. In the days, a generation ago, when many of us were caught up in the educational ferment of the Progressive movement, we felt as we did largely because we were able to act in the classroom according to our most deeply held ideals about what it meant to be a hu-

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man being. What has endured from those days is the conviction many of us share that, at its best, education is a spiritual process; a process in which the teacher as artist works with the human spirit as his medium; a process in which the good life is treated as an actuality for children, not something to be postponed pending education. The doctrine of the wholeness of a person's response to his environment, and the uniqueness of his response, is an assertion that a human being is an integrated, individualistic, responsive creature. The doctrine of respect for the individual is a declaration that mankind is worth while.

Two Assertions Are Examined

I propose in what follows to offer two assertions about the nature of Man, and to see what each of these means, expressed as choice of curriculum content. In doing this, I mean to illustrate a way of thinking about the curriculum that seems promising.¹

Man is a reasoning being. This is an obvious proposition to most of us, most of the time. While we are aware of irrationality, and during modern times have allowed it a legitimate place in our thinking about ourselves, we prize our ability to use reason in the

¹ Many such formulations have been made by theologians, philosophers and psychologists. One recent formulation that is very intriguing is by Gordon Allport, in his fascinating little book, *Becoming* (Terry Lectures, Yale University Press, 1955).

understanding and solution of problems.

Let us see what this proposition implies for the content of the curriculum. What experiences in school can lead children to understand and make use of their own rationality? Arithmetic is one category that has obvious relevance here. Arithmetic is a form of logic—of reasoning. At its root, arithmetic consists of reducing reality to a certain kind of symbol, then manipulating the symbols according to a more or less fixed logical plan, in order to deduce from the known some property that is unknown. When children are helped to formulate arithmetic problems, they are learning to rationalize, arithmetically. When children are restricted to computation alone—the so-called “fundamental processes”—they are prevented from learning the logic. In the degree that drill is used in the absence of a logic that is understandable to a child, the child is “conditioned” like Pavlov’s dog. He is not treated as a rational being.

Another form of reasoning is represented by language and the language arts. When language is so used as to help children formulate truth about themselves and others, it is an aid to an understanding of humans as rational beings. How could language be used this way? One way is through the gathering and ordering of information. If one takes the rational quality of man into account, the conventional “report” by a child, representing his (or his committee’s) attempt to put facts in meaningful order is an exceedingly important learning activity.

Science certainly is a discipline based on reasoning. The rational nature of

science is expressed in the logic of experimentation—the logical form through which most scientific concepts are built. In an elementary school, a teacher who sees science as a way of asserting the rationality of man would go beyond the teaching of concepts to the more subtle area in which children are helped to make their own generalizations about the physical environment.

I have chosen for these illustrations three subject matter fields which often are viewed simply as skill areas, or information areas. Social studies as it is now conceived lends itself far more easily to the kind of treatment implied by the kind of approach being explored here. Obviously, when children are taken through experiences as close to their immediate living as their own communities, or are encouraged to study how people live under varying conditions, the opportunities to build skill in reasoning are rich. Moreover, almost any study of men implies that men are rational—for it is the rationale of their work that one studies when one asks, “How does the policeman help us?” or “How do boys and girls live in Cleveland? How does this differ from the way they live in Montevideo?”

Looking at these three subject-matter areas—arithmetic, language arts, and science—in this way leads us to emphasize certain aspects of these fields. Instead of placing most of our emphasis on the errors children make in “doing” arithmetic, we ask, “How can children learn to be good formulators of arithmetic problems?” Not that accuracy in computation isn’t essential—it’s simply not a sufficient view of the

contribution of this logical form. In reading, instead of putting most of our emphasis on comprehension, we are led through this approach to a step beyond comprehension—to the ordering of what is comprehended. We ask, "How can children learn to put facts in logical order?" The answer to this question would lead us to correct the widely held impression among children that their chief task in reading is to remember what they have read. Their chief task, as rational human beings, is to interpret. Rote memory was never enough. In science, this approach leads us away from an exclusive emphasis on the mastery of information and concepts, toward an emphasis on the methods of science—the rationales. We might ask, "How can children learn scientific 'knowing'?"

Man is a self-evaluator. It is often pointed out that among all the animals, only Man can will his own destruction. There have been men who conclude that they are worthless, and so evaluating themselves, act on the conclusion. At a less dramatic level, all of us are aware of our self-evaluation. Children constantly, even anxiously, appraise themselves. The unspoken question on a child's mind is, "Who am I?" "What does my existence signify?" The content we choose in school implies a partial answer to this eternal question. It is our business as teachers, therefore, to help children to make their self-evaluation as realistic and appropriate as they can, considering their maturity and experience.

Expressed as choice of content, we recognize Man as a self-evaluator when we encourage children to read about

people who have tried to evaluate themselves—or explain themselves to themselves, as Tom and Huck often do in *Huckleberry Finn*: to talk and think about what makes people admirable. It lends important meaning to the idea of art as expressiveness. One can learn to understand one's self through the examination of one's own expression. A teacher in the language arts in the elementary school can introduce such themes as, what I like and don't like about myself, what I want to become, things that make me feel joyful, or angry, or fearful, and the completion of unfinished stories involving the behavior of children in problem situations. Most lyric poetry deals with this same theme. Perhaps poetry would seem less repugnant to children if we stressed its form less, and emphasized what the poet is saying that would help us in our self-evaluation.

I have tried, through a very brief "spelling out" of two assertions about the nature of Man, to illustrate a way of thinking about the choice of curriculum content. This way of thinking has the advantage of allowing me to approach the subject anew, with little feeling that I must be bound by the field as it is. A structure for thinking that allows me to relate my most important beliefs to my professional behavior is, of course, more satisfying than one that tends to separate the two. Moreover, an attempt to derive curriculum content from assertions about the nature of Man suggests significant curriculum research. I propose continuing with it. Perhaps others whose work has led them to deal with similar concerns will help toward a clarification of these beginnings.

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