

THE PATCHWORK CURRICULUM

Each day brings new evidence that elementary and secondary schools are not doing what someone expects of them. And each day someone expects something more. In recent years schools have added, or overhauled, programs in consumer education, family life education, values education, law-related education . . . you can add to the list. Schools teach toothbrushing and television as well as geography and grammar.

Let's face it, it's a patchwork.¹ And it will continue to be, because American schools are responsive to public demands, and American teachers tend to teach what they think is important. Perhaps that is as it should be.

A well-organized, coherent curriculum might also be static and inflexible. At least one of our authors (Mayhew) thinks so. Others, however, say we must do better.

Harvard University, which led the way in the 1940s, has made a new attempt to define general education at the college level.² It may be time to reassess what is important for students to learn in elementary and secondary schools.

The question, of course, is whether the true curriculum—what students actually learn—is as fragmentary as the curriculum guides and lesson plans suggest. Do students recognize interrelationships among things they learn, or do the pieces remain isolated from one another? Can students and teachers internalize a process that enables them to satisfy new concerns without neglecting old ones? Can we—should we—set priorities for what the schools are to teach?

These questions are addressed in this issue of *Educational Leadership*. What do you think? We invite your comments and, if it seems advisable, we will print them in a future issue.

—Ron Brandt

¹ Gordon Cawelti. *Vitalizing the High School*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1974.

² Susan Schiefelbein. "Confusion at Harvard: What Makes an Educated Man?" *Saturday Review*, April 1, 1978. pp. 12-18.

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