

Curriculum History Repeats Itself in Maryland

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The modern field of curriculum became a distinct area of endeavor soon after John Franklin Bobbitt wrote *The Curriculum*¹ in 1918. Impressed by the methods of business and factory management, Bobbitt, a school administrator, applied these practices to the problems of schooling. Although he later revised much of his early thinking about curriculum development, he is best remembered for his initial approach. His perspective became the dominant mode of thought among curriculum developers in the schools.

Because Bobbitt believed education should prepare children to be productive adults, he focused on adult life as the source of goals, objectives, and activities to be included in the curriculum. He based his analysis of adult life on "the testimony of some 2,700 mature and cultivated individuals"² (largely graduate students at the University of Chicago and high school teachers in Los Angeles). He and his associates also searched newspapers, magazines, books, encyclopedias, and poems for statements of civic duty, areas of deficiency in the adult community, and issues of major concern to adults. His search was not so much for the daily activities of average adults as for "those activities which constitute the latest and highest level of civilization."³

Bobbitt's studies were less an analysis of adult life than a series of opinion polls. From the activities on which consensus was achieved, he produced a list of over 900 objectives, some of which were to be the starting point for the school curriculum.

Project Basic

The most recent attempt at rigorous and far-reaching curriculum reform

in Maryland is Project Basic, whose model shares many characteristics with Bobbitt's. Adult activities are the source of objectives for the curriculum, and the methodology includes generating lists and polling opinion in order to reveal levels of consensus. In Maryland "educators, students, and other citizens generated 535 behaviors in the areas of writing, citizenship, survival, leisure, and work"⁴ and rated their relative importance. The 253 most important behaviors were arranged on lists and submitted to "population samples for appropriate interest groups in the state. . . ."⁵ Respondents' answers as to whether or not each behavior should become a high school graduation requirement were tabulated in order to find the degree of consensus for each. Those behaviors achieving a high degree of consensus became the basis for development of curriculum objectives.

While Bobbitt's list of objectives may be somewhat more idealistic and Project Basic's is certainly more precise, the two are fundamentally comparable. The areas of adult activity are similar and many of the same skills are stressed on both lists.

Criticisms

Bobbitt's approach to curriculum design has been critiqued from the 1920s to the present,⁶ and many of the criticisms can be applied to Project Basic as well. For example, by using the activities of adults to shape the education of children, both Bobbitt and Project Basic emphasize the conservative element in schooling. The existing social order imposes standards that may limit progress and change while emphasizing conformity and continuity. Bobbitt and Project Basic also share a desire for precision and certainty which results in a focus on easily measurable outcomes, although these are not the only effects of schooling and may not be the most significant or interesting ones.

An emphasis on efficiency, objectivity, and neutrality, another element common to Bobbitt and Project Basic, often masks the moral and ethical decisions curriculum developers must make. Curriculum development is construed as a technical task and objectives are thought to be discovered rather than created by curriculum developers. Models of curriculum development are accepted as value-free, timeless realities. These models themselves appear to dictate which curriculum objectives are viable, and curriculum workers are then guided more by their technology than by their social vision.

Curriculum planning for the future requires new perspectives and fresh insights. We need new questions and novel modes of inquiry. Without an awareness of the history of curriculum, we are in danger of mistaking reformulations of old perspectives for waves of the future. Moving beyond traditional frames of reference is possible only if we acknowledge, understand, and learn from our past. ■

¹ Franklin Bobbitt, *The Curriculum* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1918).

² Franklin Bobbitt, *How to Make a Curriculum* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1924), p. 35

³ Franklin Bobbitt, *Curriculum Investigations* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1926), p. 1.

⁴ "Procedures for the Consensual Validation of Competencies Generated by Project Basic." Maryland State Department of Education, undated, p. 1. (Mimeographed)

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶ See, for example, Bode, B. H., "Book Reviews—The Curriculum," *Educational Administration and Supervision*, Vol. X, No. 7, October 1924, pp. 471-474; and Kleibard, Herbert M., "Bureaucracy and Curriculum Theory," in Vernon F. Haubrick (ed.) *Freedom, Bureaucracy, and Schooling*, 1971 Yearbook (Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1971) pp. 74-93.

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