



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958 by Herbert M. Kliebard
Martin McLean

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look at the evolution of a uniquely American system of education in the USA over the last 100 years through the eyes of a European Comparative Educationist and not as an American scholar steeped in American myths which have made 'modern' rhetoric part of the American dream.

BRIAN HOLMES, *Emeritus Professor of Comparative Education, University of London*

The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893–1958

HERBERT M. KLIEBARD, 1987

New York, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 300 pp.

How the curriculum developed in the United States in the first half of this century is highly pertinent to an understanding of the debates about school quality from the 1958 National Defense Education Act through to the 1983 report 'A Nation at Risk'. It is of considerable interest also in other countries, including those of Europe, where school reform has been influenced by American models and where American-derived course construction and assessment procedures have had an impact on higher education.

For Europeans there are puzzles about what a 'pragmatic' view has meant for the curriculum of American schools and about the strength of pragmatism in American education. Philosophically, we associate the pragmatic view of schooling with John Dewey, yet much of what happens in American education seems to be quite inconsistent with Dewey's teaching. From time to time, as in 1958 and 1983, the pragmatic practices of American schools are subject to powerful attacks. Yet what is proposed instead is another version of pragmatism.

Professor Kliebard skilfully and meticulously unravels some of these puzzles. His starting-point is the 1893 Report of the Committee of Ten of the National Education Association. This committee proposed a broadly academic high school curriculum which would simultaneously prepare students for higher education and 'for life', and which would be offered to all students regardless of ability or future occupations. This starting-point makes the book interesting from a comparative perspective, for the 1893 report foreshadowed what has been proposed in other countries in the 1960s and 1970s as mass and often common secondary education was introduced.

In the USA after 1893, the participants in debates about the school curriculum were mainly pragmatists. Those who supported a humanist curriculum of academic subjects—apart from William Torrey Harris, the USA Commissioner for Education in the late nineteenth century—were usually senior figures in prestigious private universities such as Hutchings (Chicago) and Babbit (Harvard) who had little influence on schooling. But there were many varieties of pragmatism. The scientific management approach to the curriculum, inspired by Frederick Taylor's system of industrial organisation, was represented by Snedden and Babbit. Psychometricians like Thorndike were concerned mainly with measurement of results. Child-centred progressives such as Kilpatrick focused upon the 'project method'. Reconstructionists like Counts wanted to use schools to build a new and more just social order. But there were also advocates of highly instrumental vocational courses such as Prosser. These participants

in the debates agreed that knowledge was for its use rather than for its own sake. But they could agree on little else.

The greatest educational pragmatist of the time, John Dewey, was potentially central but actually peripheral to these debates, Professor Kliebard argues. He was central in that he gave some intellectual cogency to pragmatic ideas of curriculum design and because he placed them within a coherent and original educational philosophy. But Dewey had surprisingly little impact on public discussion about the curriculum. His philosophy was not easily reduced to the crude slogans in terms of which the debates were conducted. Even his avowed followers such as Kilpatrick did not properly understand Dewey's concept of pragmatism.

The outcome of this intellectual shallowness, Professor Kliebard claims, was a 'hybridisation' in the curriculum practice of American schools. There was a *mélange* of frequently inconsistent ideas. The book ends with the attack of Admiral Rickover on this curriculum practice in 1958—that is, the start of a thirty-year period of continual criticism of the content of American schooling. This criticism was as much a product of the failure of educationists to work out a convincing rationale for the school curriculum in the previous 600 years as it was a response to the Soviet sputnik.

This book is a very valuable contribution to an important topic. It is not always easy to follow when the style is somewhat dense, the number of references to sources sometimes swamps the expression of the argument and there is an unsatisfactory compromise between a thematic and a chronological scheme for organising the book. These reservations apart, this work has great authority and is of central importance for curriculum specialists not only in the USA but also in the other countries throughout the world where the American curriculum has had an influence.

MARTIN MCLEAN, *University of London Institute of Education*

Separation of Church and Child. The Constitution and Federal Aid to Religious Schools

THOMAS VITULLO-MARTIN & BRUCE COOPER, 1987
Indianapolis, The Hudson Institute

In July 1985 the United States Supreme Court decided that it was unconstitutional for public school teachers to provide federally financed extra instructional services to eligible pupils on the premises of non-public sectarian schools. The *Aguilar v. Fulton* decision of the Supreme Court raised a storm of protest. To most European readers this reaction is bound to cause little surprise. The recent educational history of a number of West European countries (France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, etc.) has indeed shown that relations between church and state in educational matters are all too apt to lead to all sorts of frictions and sometimes even to virulent emotional reactions.

Thomas Vitullo-Martin and Bruce Cooper have both been actively involved in the private schools sector since the 1960s, particularly as regards federal policy on independent and religiously affiliated schools. They are thus in a position authoritatively to treat these rather complex matters, but at the same time it would be difficult to regard them as completely unbiased experts on these same problems.

As a starting-point for their arguments, the authors take the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 11 April 1965. Title I of this law helped under-