

Conclusions and Recommendations from the Idaho Education Survey Commission, 1946

In 1945, the Idaho Legislature asked the George Peabody College of Teachers to study the education system in Idaho and make recommendations for change. A final report was presented to the Legislature in 1946. The following are some passages from the chapter on Curriculum and Instruction.

These are included as part of the Knowledge Base Support System because even though they were written nearly 60 years ago, they are very relevant to educational design today.

Contents

General Statements
Approaches to Teaching
Purpose in Education
Focus and Subject Matter
Integrating Subjects
School-Community Relationships
Proposed Curriculum
The Experience Unit Method

GENERAL STATEMENTS

- The school...is no mere receptor of what is in the culture. It is at once receptor and donor; it both gives and takes.
- Since the relation of school to society is one of interaction it cannot be expected that teaching will show a high degree of unity and coherence when society itself is characterized by confusion of purpose and values.
- Idaho desires better for its children and youth. The first step toward the achievement of this objective is for more individuals to begin to grasp that the school is part and parcel, warp and woof, of life itself. To begin to grasp this fact is to begin to discover that **the significant problems of education are the same as those of the community**. It is to begin to discover that **if better ways of living and learning are to be realized for children and youth, then, they will have to begin to be realized for adults**. It is to begin to discover, in brief,

that **education is not something apart from life, but that in a very real sense it is life.**

APPROACHES TO TEACHING

- **The type of teaching which predominates is one which may be designated as “assign-study-recite-and-test.” This type of teaching is characterized by a logical arrangement of subject-matter materials as found in textbooks, with the emphasis of teaching upon the acquisition of learning outcomes derivable from experiences with subject-matter.**
- Another and **fundamentally different type of teaching** is employed by a minority of teachers. It is a type of teaching which may be designated by the term **“experience unit.”** Learning activities are **organized around pupil purposes, and utilize socially useful subject-matter and materials.** The focus of teaching is upon the achievement by pupils of learning outcomes **inherent in their own experiences,** with subject matter content being utilized to reconstruct the experience of pupils.
- The theoretical differences between the two methods are sharp, but in actual practice teachers utilize elements of both methods. However, the great majority of Idaho teachers make more use of the assign-study-recite and test method of teaching than they do the experience unit.

PURPOSE IN EDUCATION

- The majority of Idaho teachers **do not attach sufficient importance to the role of purpose** in teaching and learning.
- One of the major criticisms of teaching offered by the pupils interviewed was that they were frequently asked to engage in activities for which **they could see no worthwhile purpose...**Much of the learning of pupils is **based on the memorization of facts, without understanding of the relation of one fact to another, or of understanding the relation of the facts learned about day-to-day living.**
- In the day-to-day living of adults it is an accepted fact that individuals work with enthusiasm and intelligence at those tasks which lead to some desired goal or goals...In school, however, it is frequently true that pupils are provided with no more worthwhile purpose than that of avoiding the displeasure of the teacher, of making a low grade, or achieving a high one...**A sound conception of learning on the part of teachers is the first requirement in securing the participation of pupils in evolving worthwhile purposes for learning. A sound conception of learning requires that the outcomes of learning be thought of in terms of**

understanding, attitudes, and special skills and abilities rather than in terms of mastery of subject-matter content and the memorization of factual information.

- The complaint voiced by many teachers to the effect that pupils have no standards of their own...has real basis in reality. It is certain that there will be cause for complaint on this score so long as it is true that pupils are excluded from the processes of evaluation.
- **Both elementary and high school teachers should begin to share thinking with each other and with school leaders about ways and means of securing more pupil participation in (1) evolving the purposes of learning, (2) devising ways and means of achieving the purposes sought, and (3) evaluating both the processes and outcomes of learning.**
- It is not suggested that the school become an agency of moral reforms. What is meant is that **the purpose of education is not just knowledge of facts, but also knowledge of and commitment to values.** Whether the school wills to do so or not, it trains for character as it trains the mind. **It is suggested that the schools give more consideration to the teaching of the meaning of our democratic way of life, and to the moral training of youth for democratic living.**

FOCUS and SUBJECT MATTER

- The elementary school curriculum of Idaho is subject-matter-centered. **Only a few teachers attach primary importance to the total experience of the child.**
- There are four major objections to the subject matter curriculum. The first is that it results in many meaningless experiences for pupils. This is true for the reason that **the starting point and continuing motivation for all learning are the needs and interests of the learner...**
- A second weakness inherent in the subject matter curriculum is that it does not adequately prepare children for meeting life situations. The problems of day-to-day living do not divide themselves according to arithmetic, spelling, science, or history...**The experiences of the child in school should provide for training in ways of thinking which cut across subject matter lines, instead of in ways of thinking which are limited to isolated subjects...**
- The teaching of a large number of isolated subjects makes it difficult for teachers to give proper emphasis to pupil participation (1) in planning the purposes of learning, (2) in devising ways and means of working toward the achievement of agreed upon goals, and (3) in evaluating the processes and the outcomes of learning. **The teaching of a large number of isolated subjects virtually requires that the teacher *tell* the pupil what to do, how to do it, and in the**

end, tell him how well he has done what he was told to do. When such a method of teaching is employed, the pupil is likely to be relatively passive in what he does...

INTEGRATING SUBJECTS

- **The teaching of a large number of isolated subjects requires that the day be chopped up into numerous short periods.** In many classrooms *what follows what* is determined as much by the jingling of a bell or the position of the hands on a clock, as it is by the judgment of teachers and pupils...**In teaching and learning one thing should lead to another** and the teacher has no greater responsibility than that of working with pupils in such a way that they make wise choices in determining the next appropriate thing to do and learn.
- There is another and more desirable form of subject-matter curriculum...It is a type of subject matter which extracts subject matter content from the various fields of human knowledge and combines them....**The combined subjects type of curriculum is much more desirable than the isolated subjects curriculum but the fundamental weakness of each is the same. It is that they focus upon subject matter to the neglect of the total experience of the child. The great need is for teachers to begin to think of subject matter as the means of education rather than its end.**

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

- All schools are community schools in the sense that they all serve community needs...**Some schools provide a wide range of services while others make a systematic attempt, it would appear, to isolate school and community.**
- Thoughtful teachers in the first grade are well aware that many of their problems emanate from the homes of the children they teach. **Only a few schools, however, are trying to change the home conditions which give rise to numerous problems in the school.**
- It is not for the school alone to determine the nature of school-community relationships...**What is needed is for school leaders and teachers to show their faith in education by educating adults to the point where they will be at once competent and willing to think and plan with school leaders and teachers relative to community needs...**
- **Once school leaders, teachers, and lay citizens begin to make attempts to relate the program of the school to community needs they will discover that there are many important community needs which cannot be met in the most effective manner without outside help.**

PROPOSED CURRICULUM

- **The curriculum proposed by the Educational Policies Commission has at its center of organization the problems of personal and community living. The emphasis of the curriculum is upon the building in school and community of a way of life which at once would prove realistic, democratic, and intellectual. One fundamental assumption is that every aim, thought, need, fear, and taste of youth is influenced by the total environment. A corollary of this assumption is that the starting point and continuing motivation of all learning are the interests and needs of youth, within the context of democratic social living.**
- **The solution of the problem lies in the direction of developing an educational experience for youth which, in its essence, means the same thing to *all* youth, but which shows variations in method and subject matter in accordance with the differing needs of youth.**
- In an attempt to develop a better curriculum for the elementary and high schools of Idaho the following conceptions are suggested as guides to action:
 1. **The curriculum consists of all experiences of each child or youth which are affected by the school.**
 2. **The problem of developing a better curriculum cannot be divorced from the problem of improving teachers and the circumstances of living.**
 3. **Curriculum development is a continuous undertaking.**
 4. **The level of taste and intelligence of the community determines in large part what is learned in school. Curriculum development should, therefore, involve not only school leaders, teachers, and pupils, but also outside educational agencies, parents, and other interested lay citizens.**
- Four major undertakings are recommended as a means of developing a better curriculum: (1) studies of contemporary life, including the local community; (2) studies of the nature of learning and the circumstances favorable to learning; (3) studies of the basic needs, interests, concerns, and aspirations of pupils; (4) studies of subject-matter content.

...**general principles** of selection which should prove helpful to individuals undertaking the work of curriculum development (include) the following:

1. **Learning experiences should relate to subject-matter which is at once valid and significant.**
2. **Learning experiences should afford opportunity for the personal growth and development of pupils in a variety of ways.**

3. Learning experiences should relate to the basic interests and needs of pupils.
4. Learning experiences should be as life-like as is possible to make them.
5. Learning experiences should possess the qualities of continuity and of sequence.
6. Learning experiences should provide for individual differences.

THE EXPERIENCE UNIT METHOD as described in the Report (219-22):

A. Purpose

1. The primary purpose of education is that of wholesome living in the present; it is assumed that wholesome living in the present is the best preparation for adult life.
2. Facts and skills are taught as they contribute to the total development of pupils.
3. The understanding and control of present-day personal and social needs is of primary importance; the cultural heritage is utilized as it contributes to this end.

B. Learning

4. Learning is thought of in terms of wholesome living; the pupil learns through his own experiences involving planning, devising, thinking, and judging under the stimulation and guidance of the teacher.
5. The outcomes of learning are thought of primarily in terms of changed behavior, attitudes, understandings, insights, skills, and abilities.
6. Learning relates to problems which are thought to have significance for the present; rich social living is of primary importance.
7. There is little or no memorization of subject-matter content; the emphasis which is placed upon the responses of the pupil insures that he will have little or no difficulty in relating what he studies to his own background of experience.
8. The learning activities of pupils have a psychological continuity; one thing leads to another as children mature and grow in their ability to derive benefits from experiencing new and more difficult situations.

C. Organizing Experiences

9. The experiencing of the pupil is organized about broad fields of knowledge, such as the language arts or social studies, or about functional areas of living such as earning a living or maintaining physical and mental health.

D. Discipline

10. There is a maximum of freedom commensurate with the ability of the pupil to direct the course of his own experience; expression and cultivation of individuality is sought; the controls of behavior are inherent in the ways of living and learning of the group.
11. A spirit of cooperation prevails in the classroom; pupils are pitted more against their own record than they are that of their classmates.

E. Pupil Participation

12. Pupil participation in (1) planning the purposes of learning, (2) devising ways and means of working toward achievement of agreed-upon purposes, and (3) judging the processes and outcomes of learning.

F. Activities

13. The range of learning activities engaged in by pupils is broad and shows considerable variation from day to day.