learning would be broadened and more worldly. This broadening of the student’s educational offerings would also include an appreciation and respect for the work done by the authors of great literary works. Bobbitt also proposed that the school’s curriculum develop each student’s intellect. Instead of guiding students to a predetermined vocation, students were encouraged to become free thinkers and were motivated to learn on their own. In addition, their career path was not selected for them. The new goal was to make them lifelong learners.

Our current educational system provides students the opportunity to learn through an enriched curriculum that offers varied subjects. These general education offerings provide students with the information, background, and exposure to many vocational and academic areas. This method emulates Bobbitt’s beliefs that students should continue on a general education track until they are 18 years of age. By the age of 18, students will have been exposed to various subjects and will have the ability to make informed decisions regarding their future. This reform in his thinking was the beginning of a new approach for social efficiency and its role in determining students’ roles in the future of society.

Curriculum is no longer vocationally driven once schools are reorganized. Instead, teachers are the facilitators of education. They encourage students to test, evaluate, and think abstractly when making the most appropriate learning decisions. Teachers are an integral part of the lesson design today, as conceived by Bobbitt. They now engage in curriculum mapping in order to provide a holistic approach to curriculum construction. Bobbitt’s beliefs are evident in the role teachers have in writing curriculum construction and courses of study for their classes. Their opinions are being heard, and they are being empowered to shape and mold curriculum based on the needs of the learner and state core curriculum content standards. Linking the subject matter to the interest of the students is seen today in teachers’ specific daily lesson plan construction and design. Students’ learning styles are being used in curriculum construction and in lesson planning. A vast amount of knowledge has been uncovered while researching the human brain as it relates to how the learner learns and therefore how educational goals are developed. Knowing how the learner learns enables teachers to plan more effectively.

Bobbitt’s philosophy, thoughts, and objectives are seen in today’s models for curriculum development. His initial thoughts evolved, and with his change of heart came the involvement and motivation of students in the learning process for the improvement of society. Although not widely known, the prevalence of Bobbitt’s social efficiency theory still impacts education. Bobbitt may be remembered as one of the great reform thinkers whose constructs are still applicable in educational policy and practice.

Mario C. Barbiere

See also Curriculum Controversies; Dewey, John; Essentialism; Experiential Learning; Herbartian Movement; Progressive Education

Further Readings


Social Reconstructionism

The 1920s brought a resurgence of concern for the individual among many American intellectuals and a decline in their desire to continue the social reform of the Progressive era. This attitude led most progressive educators to emphasize fostering the natural and creative impulses of the child as the primary role of the school. Throughout the decade and into the 1930s, these child-centered progressives dominated the Progressive Education Association, founded in 1919. By the 1930s, however, the Great Depression was again leading American intellectuals to see the individual as shaped by society. They believed that improving American society by solving the dire problems of the Depression would in turn benefit the individual. Among these intellectuals were progressive
educational theorists who saw the school as one institution that could promote social reform. Led by George S. Counts, William H. Kilpatrick, Harold Rugg, and others affiliated primarily with Teachers College, Columbia University, they rejected the traditional idea that the role of the school was simply to transmit the culture, arguing instead that schools should lead in the reconstruction of society by promoting a collectivist economy that would cure the ills of capitalism. They even went so far as to advocate the use of indoctrination to achieve that goal. Their educational theory, called social reconstructionism, generated considerable debate among educators and other intellectuals during the 1930s. The debate eventually spilled over into the larger society when some of their ideas appeared in the American Historical Association’s proposal to reform the social studies curriculum and in a controversial series of social studies textbooks written by Harold Rugg. For more than a decade, social reconstructionism faced growing criticism, and by the mid-1950s, the conservative mood of the country and calls for a return to traditional schooling led to the demise of this reform effort along with the larger progressive education movement.

Beginning in 1927, a small group of progressives, including Counts, Kilpatrick, and Rugg, gathered with America’s leading philosopher, John Dewey, to discuss the role of the school in a changing industrial society. Early in the Depression, their discussions expanded into a raging debate with the child-centered progressive educators. At the annual meeting of the Progressive Education Association in 1932, George Counts asked the membership, “Dare Progressive Education be Progressive?” He criticized progressive education for not having a theory of social welfare beyond individualism and argued for ridding the economy of the evils of capitalism through a planned, collectivist economy. His speech soon generated considerable discussion for the remainder of the meeting. Counts later expanded his argument in a pamphlet titled Dare the School Build a New Social Order? Answering this question, he opined that truly progressive education required investigating social issues, developing a theory of social welfare, overcoming the fear of imposition and indoctrination in the classroom, and creating a collective economy to save democracy.

By 1933, Counts and his colleagues sought to develop and disseminate social reconstructionism. In addition to Counts’s pamphlet, these scholars participated in a symposium titled The Educational Frontier, whose published proceedings were edited by Kilpatrick and created a journal called The Social Frontier. Counts edited the journal, Kilpatrick, Rugg, and others joined the enterprise, and John Dewey agreed to write a monthly article.

Contributors to The Social Frontier generally agreed with Counts on the conflict between the individualism of the old agrarian society and the values of the new corporate industrial society. They also thought teachers ought to be leaders in planning the social and economic reconstruction of America, and schools should be part of that transformation. They disagreed with Counts, however, on the use of indoctrination in the classroom, and some of them were not optimistic about the power of the school to foster the reconstruction until it had been appropriately reformed.

The Social Frontier first appeared in October 1934, and throughout its life, the role of education in the social and economic crisis of the 1930s was its central theme. Editorials reflected the perspective of social reconstructionism, asserting that the age of individualism in America was being superseded by an age of collectivism. Counts and some contributors contended that the success of such a transformation depended on the degree to which organized education became identified with social reconstruction. They saw schools and teachers as potentially powerful forces in the effort to reform the society. In an early issue devoted to the topic of indoctrination, all but one contributor argued that indoctrination was necessary for inculcating the ideas of social reconstruction into the minds of students. The lone dissenter, philosopher Boyd H. Bode, objected to indoctrination, except, ironically, to convince others it was wrong.

As radicalism in America diminished after 1935, so did social reconstructionism. The radical rhetoric of The Social Frontier brought a decrease in subscriptions by 1937. Editorials by Kilpatrick, the new editor, emphasized the principles of democracy and the need for changes in the economy. The softening of social reconstructionism also became evident as contributors began criticizing the New Deal and its apparent failure to alleviate the problems of...
the Depression. In 1939, the Progressive Education Association agreed to support the journal and changed its title to Frontiers of Democracy, but even discussions about World War II failed to keep the journal alive after 1943.

Before the decline of radicalism, however, social reconstructionism had spread beyond a group of radical progressive educators to the larger intellectual community and the schools. In 1934, the report of the American Historical Association’s Commission on the Social Studies, authored by eminent historian Charles A. Beard and others, showed Counts’s influence in its support of social reconstruction and a movement toward collectivism. This politically charged report elicited immediate condemnation from some progressive educators and criticism of its threat to freedom of thought from Boyd Bode, who, like John Dewey, was generally sympathetic to the concerns of the social reconstructionists.

The impact of social reconstructionism in the schools resulted from the work of Harold Rugg. In the 1920s, Rugg had sought to introduce social problems into the school curriculum. By 1929, he had developed a series of pioneering social studies textbooks titled Man and His Changing Society. Between 1929 and 1939, the series sold nearly 1.4 million copies, a considerable achievement amid a shrinking economy. These textbooks became the most significant achievement of the effort to reform the schools along the lines of social reconstruction. Yet, like The Social Frontier and the report of the American Historical Association Commission, Man and His Changing Society felt the effects of declining radicalism in the late 1930s and the stinging criticism of journalists, school districts, and the American Legion. Despite a defense from some of the “frontier thinkers,” by 1940 interest in Rugg’s textbooks had declined sufficiently that he never revised them.

The post–World War II period brought renewed emphasis on patriotism in American society and a return to the traditional role of the school as transmitter of culture. In the face of growing criticism of the schools by the mid-1950s, social reconstructionism and the idea the school should lead in social reform died along with the progressive education movement. Nevertheless, the question of the role of the school in society at the heart of this educational theory continues to foster discussion and debate among intellectuals, educational policymakers, and the public.

Dalton B. Curtis, Jr.

See also Counts, George S.; Dewey, John; Educational Reform During the Great Depression; Eight-Year Study; Progressive Education; Progressive Education Association (PEA); Rugg, Harold

Further Readings


The New Social Studies refers to the movement that attempted to revise, update, and improve social studies instruction by creating innovative, inquiry-based curricula, and curriculum materials for K–12 social studies classrooms founded upon the structures and modes of exploration of each of the academic disciplines that comprise the social studies. Between 1962 and the early 1970s, the U.S. Office of Education (USOE), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Ford Foundation funded more than 50 projects that sought to reform how social studies was taught.

Background

When the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world’s first artificial satellite, in 1957, the general public perception was that the Russians had pulled ahead of the United States in terms of scientific advance. American military and political leaders began to examine areas in K–12 education that