

Essay Review

Politics, Markets, and the Compromised Curriculum

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THE STRUGGLE FOR THE AMERICAN CURRICULUM, 1893-1958

by Herbert M. Kliebard.

Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. 300 pp. \$24.95 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

BUILDING THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY: THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND THE SEARCH FOR SOCIAL CONTROL

by Barry M. Franklin.

Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1986. 176 pp. \$26.00 (cloth); \$12.00 (paper).

The 1980s have seen a deluge of reports that are highly critical of American education. While each of these reports offers a different diagnosis and prescription for what ails the schools, they all agree on one point: they find the American curriculum to be a disaster, particularly at the high school level. Critics have charged that the contemporary curriculum demands little effort or rigor, provides an astonishingly eclectic array of choices that have no intellectual or cultural coherence, and shows a tendency toward frivolous and watered-down courses that are lacking in serious academic content.

The appearance of two new histories of the American public school curriculum in the twentieth century offers the hope of answering some important questions about this subject. In particular, how did the curriculum develop its present state, and how should we interpret the problems afflicting the contemporary curriculum in light of this developmental process? Part of the current critical literature concerns itself primarily with the present; ignoring the historical choices and accommodations that shaped the present pattern, it depicts the contemporary curriculum as an aberration. Another part of the current critical literature seriously misuses history; it presents today's curriculum as a shameful retreat from an earlier ideal state in which academic rigor is seen as having reigned supreme. What is required at this point is a clear-headed examination of the historical development of American public school curricula. Such a study could provide the basis for an informed and balanced interpretation of the forces that are converging on the course of study in contemporary schools.

Herbert Kliebard has written a book—*The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*—that goes a long way toward meeting this need. As the title suggests,

this is a comprehensive overview of a turbulent period of curriculum change, bounded by the Report of the Committee of Ten at one end and the passage of the National Defense Education Act at the other. As the title also suggests, the author does not see this change as the result of a smooth process of evolutionary development. Instead, he argues that the curriculum was shaped and reshaped through a process of conflict and compromise as different interest groups sought to define what was taught in school. Each group had its own vision of the goals of schooling, and each translated this vision into a blueprint for the course of study.

Kliebard identifies four interest groups as the main competitors in the struggle for control of the twentieth-century American curriculum. The *humanists* (for example, Charles W. Eliot, William Torey Harris, Robert Maynard Hutchins) regarded schools as mechanisms for transmitting the traditional values, sensibilities, and cultural highlights that accumulated within Western civilization. Although they originally justified this liberal-arts curriculum as the best way to train the mental faculties (the theory of faculty psychology), in this century humanists have argued for traditional subjects on the basis of their intrinsic value as bearers of cultural tradition. Another group (G. Stanley Hall, William Heard Kilpatrick) based its curriculum ideas on the emerging study of *child development*, which led them to reject faculty psychology and argue that instruction should be reorganized around the differing learning capabilities of children at successive stages in the growth process. This group sought a child-centered curriculum that would be designed not only to match the abilities of children at each stage, but also to excite their interest.

Social efficiency educators (Leonard Ayres, John Franklin Bobbit, Charles Ellwood, Ross L. Finney, Charles C. Peters, David Snedden) perceived schools primarily as mechanisms for preparing students for future adult roles, particularly occupational roles, thus promoting the efficient operation of a complex society. From their perspective, the curriculum should be focused on only those elements that were useful in bringing about these ends and should be differentiated according to the likely adult roles that individual children would play. Finally, the *social reconstructionists* (George S. Counts, Harold O. Rugg, Lester Frank Ward) saw the school curriculum as a mechanism for promoting social change. For them, schools existed to teach students a new social vision of justice and equality in order to equip them for the task of remaking an unjust and unequal society.

Kliebard's book has many strengths: it is lucidly written, and the author discusses a wide range of issues and people in a succinct, fair, and scholarly manner. For these reasons alone it should appeal to a wide audience. But what distinguishes Kliebard's survey of this rather familiar terrain is his deft use of the four interest-group classifications to highlight the contradictory strains within the history of the American curriculum. Each group enjoyed its moment in the sun, a time when it was a major force in shaping the curriculum fashion of the moment: humanism held sway in the nineteenth century; social efficiency, with vocationalism, the junior high school, and scientific curriculum-making, was most prominent in the first two decades of the twentieth century—though its influence was never weak at any time. Child development, with the popularity of the project/activity curriculum, came to the fore in the twenties; and social reconstructionism, with the widespread adoption of critical social studies texts, was strongest in the thirties. With the critique of the life-adjustment curriculum, humanism enjoyed a resurgence in the fifties.

Yet Kliebard points out that curriculum policy, at any given moment, reflected the influence of more than one of these tendencies. The efficiency people wanted specialized vocational schools but were forced to settle for the comprehensive high school preferred by proponents of social equality. The project/activity curriculum existed side by side with scientific curriculum-making and its stress on social efficiency. During the Great Depression, the trend toward social criticism within the curriculum maintained an uneasy coexistence with child-centeredness and vocationalism. And in the forties came life adjustment, a hybrid of all three antitraditional tendencies combined in a form that approached self-caricature. The author summarizes the mixed character of curriculum shifts in this way:

Curriculum fashions, it has long been noted, are subject to wide pendulum swings. While this metaphor conveys something of the shifting positions that are constantly occurring in the educational world, the phenomenon might best be seen as a stream with several currents, one stronger than the others. None ever completely dries up. When the weather and other conditions are right, a weak or insignificant current assumes more force and prominence only to decline when conditions particularly conducive to its newfound strength no longer prevail. (p. 208)

One consequence of adopting this multiple-stream model is that a number of standard constructs for understanding curriculum history simply disappear when disaggregated into their component parts. Take, for example, Kliebard's comments on "progressive education": "The more I studied this the more it seemed to me that the term encompassed such a broad range, not just of different, but of contradictory, ideas on education as to be meaningless. In the end, I came to believe the term was not only vacuous but mischievous" (p. xi). Kliebard suggests, therefore, that what we have called progressivism is really a shifting mixture of developmentalism, reconstructionism, and social efficiency; its only unifying characteristic is that all three components are strongly opposed to the traditional humanist curriculum.

Another consequence of the author's focus on interest groups is that it allows him a fresh perspective on the enigmatic role of John Dewey in the battles over curriculum reform. Every one of these interest groups claimed his support at some point and with good reason, for his writings and speeches show clear evidence of his sympathy for some of the key concerns of each group. Yet, as Kliebard points out, Dewey did not fit comfortably in any of the four camps, and when zealots in any of these camps drew on his ideas, it was usually in a distorted form. Dewey is the one figure in this book who is portrayed as rising above the interest groups that struggled over the development of the curriculum. Ironically, Dewey's complex and sweeping vision of education never took hold in the American curriculum as powerfully as did the slogans and simplistic solutions offered in his name by the competing curriculum factions.

In addition to its considerable strengths, this book exhibits two characteristics that partially undercut its usefulness to the reader. One is a problem that is characteristic of the genre. Like the vast majority of the work done in curriculum history, this book focuses almost entirely on the rhetorical curriculum. It examines the pronouncements made by leading educators in writing and in speeches before educational organizations and uses these to represent the American curriculum. Kliebard, while recognizing that such official statements are not necessarily translated into action, adopts a cautious form of interpretation in which "those statements

represented for me a kind of weather vane by which one could gauge which way the curriculum winds were blowing" (p. x).

This weather vane, however, is necessarily a rather crude instrument for measuring the kind of impact that the rhetoric of curriculum reformers was having on the curriculum-*in-use* in American classrooms. Were teachers teaching according to the latest reform orthodoxy at Teachers College? Larry Cuban's study *How Teachers Taught* (1984) suggests that most of them were not. Official statements are an even poorer measure of the impact of reform efforts on the *received curriculum*. Were students learning what the reformers wanted them to learn from the latest curriculum development? If not, what were they acquiring from their encounters with the curriculum? Kliebard's book cannot help us answer any of these questions, yet we desperately need to know these things if we are to understand the American curriculum at anything but the level of NEA proceedings and teacher training texts. Given the difficulty of finding historical data on either the curriculum-*in-use* or the received curriculum, this is less a complaint directed to the author than a warning directed to the reader: There is less here than meets the eye.

The second problem with Kliebard's book is more significant because it represents a viable opportunity that the author missed. This is a seriously underinterpreted book. Although it is difficult to make claims about the way the curriculum was implemented over the years, Kliebard could at least have explained why the various reform groups took the positions they did and why different positions won dominance at various times within the national educational discourse. Instead, he chooses to sort various reform efforts into appropriate interest group categories and leave it at that. Categorization, however, is not explanation. For example, he notes that the social efficiency group was the strongest and most persistent of the four. But why did this approach emerge at the turn of the century? What were its original and continuing sources of support in American society? Why was it able to coexist with the child development strategy over such a long period of time? Missing is a sense of what "the struggle for the American curriculum" was all about. We need to know more than what the various factions were: we need to know what these factions represented and how their compromise reforms should be understood. It does not do justice to this material simply to provide a descriptive account of pluralist competition; the subject cries out for a strong social-historical interpretation.

Barry Franklin, in his history of twentieth-century American curricula, seeks to deal directly with both of the problems that emerge from Kliebard's book. Although he too bases most of his analysis on the rhetorical curriculum, he provides some fascinating evidence about the connection between rhetoric and practice. In his final chapter, for example, he gives a detailed study of the implementation of curriculum reform in the Minneapolis school system from 1917 to 1954. In addition, Franklin leads his readers well beyond a taxonomy of curriculum reform tendencies by presenting a clear-cut scheme for interpreting the general course of curriculum development in the first half of this century.

Franklin's interpretation is captured in his title, *Building the American Community: The School Curriculum and the Search for Social Control*. The key words are "community" and "social control." The argument goes like this: The growth of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration in the late nineteenth century created a gap between the liberal-democratic ideals on which this country was founded and the new structure of society. This gap exacerbated the old republican concern that

private commerce might overwhelm public virtue, and that economic corruption and civic decay might destroy the hope for liberty and equality. Among those most concerned about these developments were the new middle class of professionals and intellectuals who, for the most part, had been raised in small towns, where they felt community life more closely reflected traditional ideals. These men sought to close the gap between ideals and reality and cure the corruption they found in early twentieth-century America by imposing a new form of community on this society—a form of community based on the small-town model. “Their solution was to try to create within an urban, industrialized society the kind of like-mindedness and cooperation which they believed to have existed in the rural town” (p. 8).

These men¹ sought to achieve this reconstruction of community by promoting social control. “For all these thinkers,” according to Franklin, “social control referred to the diverse efforts of social groups to bring the attitudes and behavior of their members into line with accepted and customary social expectations. It is this definition that I will adopt in this volume” (p. 10). Many of these thinkers, especially leading educators, saw in the public school curriculum an ideal mechanism for carrying out this aim of social control. In sum, therefore, educational reformers sought to establish a curriculum in the public schools that would enhance social control and thereby restore a form of community in the midst of the threatening complexity of twentieth-century society.

After outlining his thesis, Franklin proceeds to develop and support it with evidence drawn from approximately the same period examined by Kliebard, 1900 to the mid-1950s. First, he explores the roots of social control theory in sociology and psychology at the turn of the century and then follows various strands of this theory. From this he turns to his central task, which is to examine the ways in which concerns about social control shaped the thinking of curriculum reformers during the first half of the twentieth century. He closes with a case study of curriculum reform efforts in Minneapolis in the same period.

The author’s analysis of “the school curriculum and the search for social control” concentrates on those curriculum reformers classified by Kliebard as members of the social efficiency interest group. This is only appropriate, since, as Kliebard frequently noted, this group exerted a stronger influence over a longer period of time than all of the others combined. While Kliebard’s interest group model provides no clear explanation for the dominance of social efficiency, Franklin’s social control perspective is designed explicitly to supply such an explanation, similar to the one summarized above. Unfortunately, the explanation provided is far from convincing because of the imprecision of some of the book’s central concepts: social control, community, urbanization/industrialization, and liberal-democratic ideals. Let us consider each of these in turn.

Social control is a murky concept, but Franklin dismisses this problem at the outset:

This volume is not concerned with the conceptual adequacy of the concept of social control, a topic that has received extensive attention. Rather, our concern is with how one group of middle-class intellectuals used the concept of social control to build the school curriculum. For this, we need a definition of social control that

¹ None of the major figures referred to in either of these books is female. This reflects the male domination of the top levels of curriculum leadership, not any lapses on the part of the authors.

captures the various meanings that these individuals have attributed to this concept throughout this century. (p. 9)

The definition Franklin chooses is the one quoted earlier. The difficulty with this definition is that it captures so many of the various meanings attributed to it over the years that it becomes a conceptual balloon lacking any explanatory edge. A concept that can be used to label the central thrust of the work of two social scientists as different as Edward Ross and George Herbert Mead is of dubious analytical utility. The thin strand of common ground between the two is that both were talking about the maintenance of social order. But there the similarity ends, for while Ross saw society imposing order, Mead saw order emerging from social interaction.

The term social control, therefore, is so broad and thin that a social control curriculum seems to mean little more than a curriculum that socializes the young, passing on shared expectations about attitudes and behaviors. Yet it is difficult to conceive of a system of schooling in any society that does not try to accomplish this goal through its course of study. As a constant in educational history, the existence of such social control goals cannot be used to explain curriculum change.

What does vary by time and place is the degree of emphasis that the curriculum places on social control (behavioral socialization) relative to cognitive skill training. In this regard it is possible to argue, as Franklin does, that the turn-of-the-century curriculum reformers from the social efficiency group were stressing socialization at the expense of intellectual content. But this observation is of more use in describing the curriculum of the period than it is in explaining why the curriculum took that form at that time. After all, Horace Mann and other leaders of the common school movement also placed a much stronger emphasis on moral education than on academic achievement. If the two most influential sets of educational reformers, the common school proponents and the progressives, both showed a bent for what Franklin defines as the social control curriculum, then the social control factor is incapable of identifying the important differences in curricular orientation between them. The most striking of these differences is that the common schoolmen sought to provide a common educational experience to the children of all classes in a Whig effort to reduce class differences, whereas the progressives accepted class differences as given and sought to construct differentiated curricula that would match the social outcomes predicted for each class.

Of course, social control is not always used in a manner that is so all-encompassing. Within the revisionist literature in the history of education, social control means something much more focused, namely the process by which dominant groups maintain control over subordinate groups through educational reform. Michael Katz (1968), for example, discussed "reform by imposition," arguing that the propertied class created Beverly High School in order to preserve its position within the changing social structure, despite the opposition of the working class. By contrast, Franklin uses social control as a cover term that cloaks more than it explains. It needs to be broken down into analytically useful parts, in the same way that Kliebard disaggregated progressive education.

The term "community" suffers from some of the same problems as social control. When did educators *not* think of curriculum as a method for "building the American community?" Social change, a constant in American history, has always posed a threat to community, and schools have always been viewed as a mechanism for preserving the core of the old values within the new structure. The significant characteristic of curriculum reformers, therefore, is not their shared concern

about community but their sharply divided vision about what kind of community the schools should be trying to construct. Should it be the social reconstructionists' egalitarian vision or the social efficiency group's hierarchical model? And why was the latter vision the one that exerted the strongest impact within curriculum reform? These are the kinds of questions that curriculum history needs to answer, but a focus on community does not help with this task.

Franklin argues that the search for community via the social control curriculum was a response to the growing gap between liberal-democratic ideals and the industrial city. In this scheme of things, urbanization and industrialization are the engines of social change. These latter terms, typically paired, are standard elements in historical accounts of the turn of the century. Like a number of other concepts from this book—including the new middle class and “the search for order” itself—they owe a debt to Robert Wiebe (1967). The difficulty is that they are diffuse terms with analytically indistinct referents, as are social control and community. More precisely, I would argue that the problem facing middle-class Americans in this period was not industrialization; rather, it was the structural transition from market capitalism to industrial capitalism to corporate capitalism and the threat which these changes leveled at the existing order of social relations. Similarly, I would argue that the problem was not urbanization but the processes of class formation and class conflict that were bound up in such structural changes. These formulations are more controversial than Franklin's, and this is good, because analytically useful concepts should be precise enough to invite debate and contradiction. Factories and cities are important signs of what was behind the curriculum reforms, but we need to dig deeper to find the roots of these reforms.

Finally, Franklin specifies incorrectly the ideological foil he sets up against these societal changes. The essential tension, I would argue, is not between liberal-democratic ideals and the structure of society, but between the liberal and the democratic components of these ideals. The American ideology has always had a strong liberal element, which elevates liberty and promotes free markets, and a strong democratic element, which elevates equality and promotes participatory politics. Since capitalist markets tend to produce inequality, and democratic politics tend to interfere with individual liberty, the two elements have been a chronic source of social tension in American history. The impact of this tension on schools has been substantial, and at no time was this impact more dramatic than at the start of this century.

The best way to understand the history of twentieth-century curriculum change—which Kliebard and Franklin both have detailed, but not explained—is to see it as the result of a process by which educators tried to deal with the contradictory claims that were placed on them. Unable to accommodate the demands of either politics or markets in any stable fashion, the curriculum existed in a state of uneasy compromise, the terms of which wobbled back and forth between the two poles. I would like to provide a brief outline of the development of the American curriculum using this perspective. After pointing out the inadequacies of the explanations offered by the present authors, it only seems fair that I suggest an alternative. What follows, however, is necessarily schematic. My aim is simply to offer a few central themes around which such a history might be organized.²

² Because the focus is on general themes rather than detailed analysis, I present this account without evidence or citations. I am drawing on the following background sources: Lindblom (1977), for the idea of “politics and markets” drawn from his book by that name; Cohen and Neufeld (1981), for their overview of the tensions implicit within the development of the high school; Carnoy and Levin

Of all the remedies that educational reformers have prescribed for the twentieth-century curriculum, two, in particular, stand out. One asserted that the curriculum should adapt itself to the heterogeneous needs and capabilities of the students who were brought into the schools by a system of universal enrollment. This doctrine of child-centeredness was espoused most fervently by members of the child-development interest group. The second remedy declared that the curriculum should adapt itself to the requirements of students' future adult roles by preparing them, in particular, for entry into the workforce. This was the doctrine of social and vocational relevance, sponsored largely by members of the social-efficiency interest group. Combining the two remedies produces a reasonable approximation of that internally inconsistent entity that we usually call progressive education. The democratic-minded progressive educators tended to stress the first imperative and to interpret the second broadly as the preparation for life, whereas those with a market orientation tended to stress the second imperative and to interpret the first as a mechanism for promoting efficient selection.

These two tendencies within the rhetorical curriculum have their roots in the longstanding tension between democratic politics and capitalist markets. Pursuing contradictory social goals, these tendencies have promoted contradictory educational effects that have severely compromised the integrity, stability, and effectiveness of the curriculum. It is precisely this combination of opposites that has shaped the distinctive character of the twentieth-century American curriculum. Given the mixture of goals we have imposed on schools, neither prescription could be implemented in its pure form, but only in some combination with its opposite. One effect of this, as Kliebard notes, is that the reform movement is difficult to characterize as a whole, since the reform process has been written in the shifting sands of coalition and compromise. Another effect is that the conflicted curriculum carried out neither prescription very well, leaving the schools with a legacy of intellectual weakness and pedagogical ineffectiveness that contemporary critics have been quick to denounce.

The common schools were founded in the new republic by men who were concerned about reducing inequality, promoting citizenship, and preserving morality in the face of the threat posed by the emergence of market capitalism. These reformers sought to protect civic virtue from the inroads of commerce (to use the terms that Franklin applied to turn-of-the-century reformers). But the common school, grounded in democratic politics, had to function in an environment that was dominated by markets and the ideology of possessive individualism. From the market perspective, the schools were not seen as collective benefits to be enjoyed equally, but rather as commodities that could be used to provide selective advantage in the individual competition for market rewards. Conspicuously serving these ends was the high school, which in the nineteenth century was a most uncommon school. With its selective admissions and its very small and mostly middle-class enrollment, the high school offered an attractive form of invidious distinction that helped to focus public attention on schooling as a mechanism for status attainment. From the very beginning, then, the common schools were under pressure to promote both equality and inequality.

(1985), for their clear delineation of the democratic and capitalist pressures on American schooling; Collins (1979), for his discussion of the historical role of educational credentials; Cohen (1985), for his concise analytical history of the twentieth-century curriculum; and my own work (Labaree, 1986, and in press), for an examination of the high school curriculum and the way it was shaped by political and market pressure.

By the end of the century the powerful market position of the high school had generated a substantial demand from the public for the right to enjoy its exclusive benefits. In a society and a system of schooling predicated on democratic principles, it proved politically impossible to continue to deny wider access to such a popular attraction. The result was the sudden explosion in high school enrollment that began about 1890. It is no coincidence that this is the period with which both Kliebard and Franklin begin their historical accounts, because this was when public schooling, led by the high school, lurched toward its modern configuration. The basic terms of the compromise that undergirds public education today emerged at the start of this century. The various reform efforts traced by the authors are movements back and forth between the two poles that define this compromise, but these efforts never succeeded in breaking one pole free from the other.

On the one hand, democratic ideology had compelled educators to extend the principle of universal education to the high school; as a result, the full extent of K-12 schooling was politically defined as open to everyone. This meant abruptly ending the exclusiveness of the high school and reconstituting it around more egalitarian aims. On the other hand, the market functions of the high school did not disappear with its abrupt democratization. After all, it was the high school's capacity to provide its students with a competitive advantage in the market that provoked the demand for wider access in the first place. The problem was that this process worked only under conditions of relative scarcity. When the high school's enrollment was small, its ability to confer distinction was high; but when the number of students in high school rose sharply, the market value of its credentials declined. How could the high school be structured so that the middle class, which had long formed its primary constituency, could continue to gain special benefits from it without simply barring the doors to the working class? How could it serve the market without abandoning democratic politics?

The compromise that emerged offered a simple exchange—open access in return for differentiated instruction. Through this compromise everyone acquired the right to attend school for twelve years, but, once in school, students were confronted with an array of curriculum choices that were stratified according to their anticipated occupational roles. To paraphrase David Cohen (1984, p. 260), the attendance was common but the education was not.

Predictably, this compromise between equality and inequality provoked a curriculum reform movement that was not unified, but bipolar. The child study/development interest group responded to the politically induced reality of extended universal schooling by arguing that, in order to teach the newcomers effectively, the school must adapt the curriculum to their developmental capacities and individual abilities. The resulting curriculum should be child-centered, designed to serve the interests and needs of this heterogeneous band of students. The social efficiency interest group responded to the market-based reality of a hierarchical occupational structure by arguing that the school must adapt curriculum to the different sorts of job roles that these students were likely to assume. These curriculum tracks should provide a scientifically prepared program of study for the different social outcomes projected for each student.

These two curriculum tendencies developed from the contradictory public and private goals of American education, but they worked out an accommodation between them that paralleled the larger compromise in twentieth-century schools. The common ground was in several related areas: Child study (particularly in the form of testing) proved useful in sorting students into the appropriate market-

oriented tracks; child-centered instruction offered the possibility of attracting student interest to the adult-oriented course of study; and job-relevant curricula in a market society provided a way of adapting school to the instrumental needs of the students. The result was a curriculum that educators could characterize as both democratic and practical.

And where did the other two interest groups fit into this picture? As Kliebard notes, the humanists lost their dominant position in shaping the curriculum, but they staged a strategic retreat into the university and into the high school's college-preparatory track. Aided by its traditional association with elite culture, the humanities curriculum helped to sharpen the differentiation between the exclusive, college-oriented, and middle-class top stratum of the American high school, and the inclusive, vocation-oriented, and working-class lower stratum. The humanists have been well positioned to stage a series of comebacks since the 1950s. The social reconstructionists, on the other hand, never achieved a secure foothold within the compromise curriculum, because they challenged the terms of the compromise itself by taking an explicitly anticapitalist position. Refusing to accept the proposition that schools should adapt students to the demands of the market, they proposed that schools should become a model of democracy and justice that could be used to transform the structure of society. In short, they argued for discarding one pole of the turn-of-the-century educational compromise and reconstructing schools around the single standard of political democracy. This radical approach found a short-lived home in social studies texts during the 1930s and then died under the patriotic onslaught of World War II.

One conclusion that emerges from this account is that the basic terms of the curriculum compromise in the twentieth century remained remarkably stable over time. Grounded in the deeper compromise between politics and markets in American life, the curriculum was powerful enough to incorporate the once-dominant humanists and to shrug off the challenges posed by the social reconstructionists. This interpretation helps explain the curriculum's resistance to radical change. But another conclusion that emerges from this interpretation is that, within the core of stability, the curriculum has been subject to a series of swings back and forth between its two poles. Kliebard situates the large swings of the pendulum between the child development and social efficiency tendencies: from Herbartianism and developmentalism (largely child development) at the start of the century, to vocationalism and the scientific curriculum (largely social efficiency) in the teens and twenties, to the activity/experience curriculum (largely child development) in the twenties and thirties, and finally, to the life adjustment curriculum (largely social efficiency) in the forties and early fifties.

One reason for this pendular motion is that the compromise curriculum, over the years, has pleased no one. Its great advantage, and the reason for its durability, is that it offers a viable defense against the charge of being either undemocratic or impractical. Yet this largely negative accomplishment leaves both sides unsatisfied. Those who seek democratic outcomes from schooling are not likely to be happy with a stratified and vocational curriculum; those who seek status attainment through schooling are not likely to be happy when schools provide the same diploma to students from all tracks. And neither side is happy about the dilution of the curriculum at all levels. One result of this vague but chronic dissatisfaction is that American education has been subjected to a continuing series of reform efforts, as interest groups have persisted in trying to bring it closer to one pole or the other in an attempt to provide the curriculum with a clear identity and a coherent structure.

If we consider contemporary assessments of the high school curriculum, we find further evidence of the persistence of the curriculum compromise and the criticism that it continues to draw. Consider the metaphors that are used: The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1982) likens the curriculum to a “cafeteria” while Powell, Farrar, and Cohen (1985) see it as a “shopping mall.” Both metaphors capture the mix of politics and markets that have characterized the curriculum for this entire century. A cafeteria and a shopping mall both are open to the public; they are geared toward mass distribution, and they offer a wide degree of choice. Yet they are also market institutions that offer consumers the opportunity to acquire commodities for their personal use. In these terms, therefore, the curriculum is widely accessible but its politics is less democratic than consumerist. At the same time, the accessibility of the curriculum leads to the mass production of high school credentials and the consequent lowering of their market value. The result is that the high school curriculum satisfies neither goal very well, as politics and markets continue to undercut each other while together they continue to block consideration of alternative curriculum goals.

In summary, the pair of books under review suggest to me that the field of curriculum history needs to explore two different directions simultaneously. First, researchers should begin to turn away from the rhetorical curriculum and examine the forms that curricula have taken in *practice* within particular districts, schools, and classrooms and the form of *learning* that students in different settings have actually experienced. As Kliebard and Franklin (1983) noted in an earlier joint article, this approach calls for a case-study method. Second, researchers should begin to construct a series of broad *interpretations* of American curriculum history, which could be developed and tested in the course of doing curriculum case studies. We need to know why curriculum change has taken such a peculiar form in this country—instability within stable limits—and how we can understand this process in relation to the larger changes affecting the role of school in society. If one considers the implications of these two suggestions, curriculum history appears to have a considerable amount of ground yet to cover, for the field still needs to tell us what the curriculum was and what it meant.

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