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## The Underlying Philosophy of the Iowa Secondary School Curriculum Program

W. H. MCFARLAND

The Iowa Secondary School Curriculum Program involves providing curriculum materials in all areas of high school instruction. Traditional subject matter areas have been maintained, not because we have assurance that this offers the best procedure in secondary education, but because under present conditions it probably affords the most practical and feasible procedure. The areas treated are broken down as follows: English and speech, language, science, mathematics, social studies, practical arts, fine arts, physical education and health, guidance, and extra-curricular activities.

The basic purpose of the program is to bring some consistent direction to secondary education, through the setting up of an acceptable philosophy and the establishing of aims toward which an integrated effort in secondary school instruction may be directed. The statements of aims and principles have been drafted to furnish the many committees at work on the construction of curriculum materials with over-all direction, and at the same time, to provide administrators and teachers in the high schools throughout the state with a basis upon which to build a more consistent, better unified, more adequately integrated program of secondary school instruction.

Admittedly instruction has too often been centered on subject matter, with each teacher bent on teaching a prescribed quantity of subject content, and with too little attention given to the individual students to whom this prescription of materials is to be fed. There is a need to refocus teaching effort from content to students, and to screen content against the needs of youth. Then, only that material and only those procedures will be valid which contribute toward the fulfillment of the needs of the young people attending the schools. In other words, objectives should be established first, and then with these objectives determined, ways and means, by way of subject content and teaching procedures, should be selected which will make it possible to accomplish these objectives.

With this thesis in mind, the committee on Philosophy and Design, which was commissioned to formulate the working philosophy for the Iowa program, agreed on certain basic ideas. These basic ideas were stated by Dr. L. A. Van Dyke, who wrote the announcement. Time does not permit presenting all of the basic ideas, and the statements of the five basic ideas selected for presentation here have been abridged.

**1. Education is a process of individual growth and experience.** The idea that education is experience and that it is a process of development of individuals as persons, as opposed to training in special skills or to the accumulation of knowledge as an end in itself, has

been advanced by philosophers and psychologists from early Greek times.

While theory and practice show a scant speaking acquaintance in many classrooms, most secondary school people agree that education must be concerned with the development of the individual as a person and that training in skills and the mastery of knowledge should be regarded as no more than means to that end.

**2. Education is implemented by the transmission of the experiences of the race from one generation to the next.** Education must have substance. An individual is not educated by simply going forth and engaging in random experiences. His experiences must point in some direction—otherwise he becomes merely a disorganized product of a series of accidental happenings. . .

It has been a physical impossibility for many centuries for any one man to master the accumulated knowledge of the race. Consequently, education has become formal and specialized in an effort to select the most valuable experiences for transmission and to find the most efficient and economical methods for perpetuating those experiences. That is the reason schools were organized. The chief function of the secondary school curriculum is to select and to transmit those experiences in our culture which will be most effective in the development and growth of individual young people as members of a free society.

**3. Schools must be free to teach truth.** Education for democracy is a sham unless schools are free to teach the truth. . .

Within the framework of public policy and accepted aims, individual teachers must be free to teach the truth. Otherwise teaching is emasculated. . .

Academic freedom implies academic responsibility. Freedom of the schools does not assume freedom of every teacher to indoctrinate students with his particular economic, political, or social theories. It means that teachers shall be free to teach truth when truth is known. Fuzzy guessing and prejudiced handling of facts do not belong in the classrooms of free schools.

**4. A literate and informed citizenry is requisite to the life and functioning of a free society.** A free society is fictitious, lacking the resources of self-discipline gained from reason and understanding. But a society of rational and informed persons is destined to be free. Demagoguery and political despotism are sorry competitors of freedom among a literate people who have access to the truth. . .

More literacy is no guarantee of freedom. Literacy may become the tool of demagogues and political racketeers. Literacy without understanding based on full and accurate information is a mockery. The first step of dictators is to seize the sources of public information and then to control the education of youth through propaganda.

In a democratic form of government in which each citizen is responsible for selecting representatives and participating in group

decisions, an informed electorate is the *sine qua non* of intelligent social action. A democratic society, therefore, must maintain a system of universal free education in order to preserve itself and to function.

More than political action is required for the preservation of a free society. Freedom is a product of the intellect. Men to be free must understand the meaning and responsibilities of freedom. They must perceive clearly the place of the individual in society, they must reason the worth and dignity of man, and they must understand the values and limitations of government.

These are among the basic principles of education in a democracy and in a free society. Means of education, therefore, must be made available to all people regardless of the accident of their birth. And above all, schools must have freedom to teach truth.

**5. All youth shall have an equal opportunity for education in keeping with their individual capabilities.** Equal education in the sense that all young folks should have the same education is both impossible and underisable. Individual youth will always vary in their background of experience, in the homes and communities from which they come, and in their capacity and desire to learn. Moreover, communities and school systems will always vary in their ability to provide educational opportunities regardless of expenditures. The cultures of communities differ, their educational traditions differ, and the qualifications of their teachers differ. . .

The ideal in American education must be to make it possible for all youth to get the best possible education consistent with their requirements and interests and irrespective of their economic status, race, nationality, or religion. Anything short of this is indefensible and stupid in a free society.

Having determined what basic ideas should form the foundation for curriculum construction, the committee then formulated objectives or aims to guide the production committees in the preparation of teaching materials.

It is the opinion of a majority of secondary school people in Iowa and of the Committee on Philosophy and Design that the secondary school has two major functions, (1) to provide *general educational* experiences which point primarily toward the development of informed and responsible persons in a free society, and (2) to provide *specialized educational* opportunities for the development of individual interests and talents.

The aims of secondary education which are proposed for the direction of curriculum improvement in the high schools of Iowa are listed below:

#### Aims of General Education

1. Communication skill
2. Health and physical fitness
3. Social understanding

4. Civic competence
5. Economic responsibility
6. Family relationships
7. Scientific understanding
8. Aesthetic appreciation
9. Philosophy of life
10. Vocational choice
11. Avocational experience

Aims of Special Education

1. Vocational education
2. Work experience
3. College preparation

It is the viewpoint of most of the teachers and administrators in Iowa high schools who submitted summaries of their opinions on various curriculum issues, that the first job of the secondary school is to provide a good program of general education. Most of these faculty groups expressed the belief that there are certain common skills and types of information that are needed by all persons in order to be reasonably intelligent citizens in a democracy, and that it is the function of the secondary school to provide such educational opportunities.

Again, time does not permit a detailed statement of each of the aims listed above, but in view of the fact that the group to whom this paper is addressed is made up of scientists and teachers of science, a more detailed analysis of the seventh aim, "scientific understanding", would seem in order.

All youth should have an understanding of natural phenomena and their implications for human welfare, be able to use the scientific method effectively and employ skills in mathematics and science in solving everyday problems. They should:

- (1) Develop a knowledge of basic laws and generalizations in the biological and physical sciences needed to understand man's natural environment.
- (2) Understand the scientific method and be able to apply it in the solution of problems.
- (3) Develop an impartial and objective attitude toward ideas and social problems.
- (4) Develop competence in mathematical and scientific skills needed in non-technical situations.
- (5) Understand the relationship of science to human welfare and to social progress.
- (6) Appreciate the contributions of science and scientists to civilization.
- (7) Be able to read and to understand non-technical scientific articles and news stories, including graphs, charts, etc.
- (8) Understand and practice the conservation of natural resources.

- (9) Develop the ability to use common mechanical appliances and to understand how they work.

One of the most important ambitions of the curriculum program would be by-passed if I did not make clear at this point that science teachers should be concerned with making all possible contributions toward the accomplishment of all of the aims. Resourceful science teachers will find many opportunities to improve communication skills, to promote the health interests of their students, to develop a sense of social responsibility, to encourage participation in activities directed toward civic improvement, to guide students toward economic responsibility, to aid youth in building a sane personal philosophy of life, to encourage an appreciation of beauty. In fact, the science teacher is more than a dispenser of scientific information; he is a teacher of youth in the broadest sense. What he teaches and how he teaches must be screened against the needs of his students in order that they may be useful and happy citizens of a free and democratic society.

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