

## *Déjà Vu All Over Again*

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“I’ve never seen where I was going but I’ve had a wonderful view of where I’ve been.”

— WWII B-17 Tail Gunner

### **TODAY OR 1893?**

Today we talk about “rigor and relevance” and the need to address the issue of quality educational programs for secondary students. Today the issue of preparation of young adolescents for post-secondary education and the world of work involves experts and input from business and community leaders as represented in Iowa’s Institute for Tomorrow’s Workforce. Today the answers to questions about what students should know, be able to do, and be like reflect the values of special interest groups. Today we are challenged by immigrant children who need to learn both English and how to function in our culture. Today we address the educational impact of economic

disadvantage on student achievement. Today the call for a set of Iowa standards and benchmarks is emerging. Today we hear the reply to maintain local control and wait for national standards and benchmarks. Today there is a lack of clarity about the fundamental role and purpose of secondary education in Iowa and perhaps the nation.

Could “today” be on the 1893 calendar?

### **WAS CURRICULUM CHAOS IN 1893 SIMILAR TO 2007?**

Imagine for a moment a situation in which all but a few of Iowa’s high schools were what we might call “charter schools,” each with its own curriculum goals, its own allocation of time for various classes, its own academic calendar, and its own way to assess student progress. Imagine further that each college had its own set of admission requirements—the courses students need to take as well as its own college admission tests and that schools found it necessary to prepare students for different colleges.

Suppose you were the principal of one of these schools, say the Swedesburg Academy or the Trenton Academy. Since you need tuition to keep the doors open, you need to attract students and meet their needs. Your market analysis shows that several students plan to attend Iowa Wesleyan College in Mt.

Pleasant, about 10 miles south of your school. However, one of your students wishes to attend the Lutheran seminary at Augustana College in Rock Island and two wish to attend the University of Iowa where they plan to study geology and engineering. How would you ensure that the prospective seminary student receives enough Latin and Greek to gain admission while the future scientists receive adequate training in mathematics and science? Of course the college preparation curriculum will be focused on the students heading to Iowa Wesleyan but there is a need to differentiate the curriculum for the others.

You also consider the fact that most of your students have no plans to attend college. They seek training for employment in business and commerce with an emphasis on practical and vocational subjects rather than the classic traditional curriculum that emphasizes Latin, Greek, and mathematics. Many are recent immigrants and desire classes in business English, bookkeeping, and practical math. As always, the business leaders of Iowa are vocal about their unhappiness with the quality of job applicants.

### **WHAT CAN CURRICULUM LEADERS OF 2007 LEARN FROM 1893?**

While this scenario is fictional, it may suffice to provide a sense of the curriculum chaos that both

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secondary and college leaders encountered in 1893. With this in mind, we can now look at the work of the Committee of Ten as it sought to rationalize the American high school and its articulation with colleges and universities.

Not only will much of this sound familiar, I

believe it can be very instructive, if not practical, for curriculum leaders in Iowa in 2007. What follows will be selected passages from the Final

Report of the Committee of Ten which can be accessed on the Internet.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE COMMITTEE OF TEN**

Here is a brief introduction to the work of that group.

In 1891 the National Education Association began to address the issue of secondary education in America and in 1892 appointed a committee consisting of ten representatives of leading colleges and secondary schools in different parts of the country. In 1893 they presented their report.

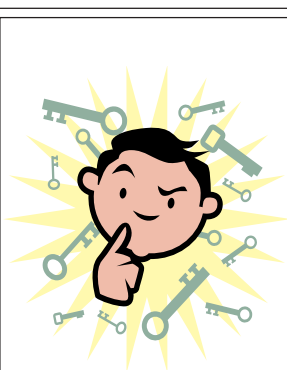
The tasks of this committee included:

- Establish a “conference” of school and college teachers in

various subject matters to examine the requirements for admission to college with respect to those subject areas. The term “conference” might translate today as “committee” or “task force.”

Results of the survey showed that:

- Nearly forty subjects were being taught in schools across the country, thirteen of which were found in only a few schools.



**Imagine that Iowa's high schools each had its own curriculum goals... and that each college had its own set of admission requirements...**

- Many subjects were taught for such a short time that little training could be expected.

- Time allocated to the same subject varied greatly from school to school.

- The conference members would consider the proper limits of its subject, the best methods of instruction, the most desirable allotments of time for the subject, and the best methods of testing the pupils' attainments.

A steering committee led by ten recognized secondary and college leaders coordinated the work of nine subcommittees. As preparation for their work, they conducted a written survey of selected secondary school principals in various parts of the country to show what subjects were taught in their schools and the amount of “recitations” or “lessons” allocated to each subject. Today we might be tempted to use the term “curriculum mapping” to describe their process.

After reviewing the survey results, the Committee of Ten decided to organize nine “conferences” for the following subjects:

1. Latin;
2. Greek;
3. English;
4. Other Modern Languages;
5. Mathematics;
6. Physics, Astronomy, and Chemistry;
7. Natural History (Biology, including Botany, Zoology, and Physiology);
8. History, Civil Government, and Political Economy;
9. Geography (Physical Geography, Geology, and Meteorology).

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Further, they recommended that each “conference” or study group consist of ten members. The result was that ninety educators were involved in the overall project. (All ninety were male and all but fifteen lived on or east of the Mississippi River. Two were from Iowa.)

### **COULD THE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE QUESTIONS FROM 1893 BE USED IN 2007?**

Suppose you are responsible for leading the curriculum conversations in your district. Which of the following questions from 1893 might be useful to guide your K-12 committee discussions? For that matter, which of these questions have we failed to address in recent years?

1. In the school course of study extending approximately from the age of six years to eighteen years—a course including the periods of both elementary and secondary instruction—at what age should the study which is the subject of the Conference be first introduced?
2. After it is introduced, how many hours a week for how many years should be devoted to it?
3. How many hours a week for how many years should be devoted to it during the last four years of the complete

course; that is, during the ordinary high school period?

4. What topics, or parts, of the subject may reasonably be covered during the whole course?
5. What topics, or parts, of the subject may best be reserved for the last four years?
6. In what form and to what extent should the subject enter into college requirements for admission? Such questions as the sufficiency of translation at sight as a test of knowledge of a language, or the superiority of a laboratory examination in a scientific subject to a written examination on a textbook, are intended to be suggested under this head by the phrase “in what form.”
7. Should the subject be treated differently for pupils who are going to college, for those who are going to a scientific school, and for those who, presumably, are going to neither?
8. At what stage should this differentiation begin, if any be recommended?
9. Can any description be given of the best method of teaching this subject throughout the school course?
10. Can any description be given of the best mode of testing attainments in this

subject at college admission examinations?

11. For those cases in which colleges and universities permit a division of the admission examination into a preliminary and a final examination separated by at least a year, can the best limit between the preliminary and final examinations be approximately defined?

### **WHAT SUBJECTS ARE OF MOST WORTH?**



The final summary report of the Committee of Ten permits us to get a flavor for some of their discussions. For example, the debate about whether some subjects are of greater worth than others involved whether or not science was of equal merit to Latin and Greek.

The Council and the public will doubtless be impressed, at first sight, with the great number and variety of important changes urged by the Conferences; but on a careful

reading of the appended reports it will appear that the spirit of the Conferences was distinctly conservative and moderate, although many of their recommendations are of a radical nature.

The Conferences which found their tasks the most difficult were the Conferences on Physics, Astronomy, and Chemistry; Natural History; History, Civil Government, and Political Economy; and Geography; and these four Conferences make the longest and most elaborate reports, for the reason that these subjects are today more imperfectly dealt with in primary and secondary schools than are the subjects of the first five Conferences. The experts who met to confer together concerning the teaching of the last four subjects in the list of Conferences all felt the need of setting forth in an ample way what ought to be taught, in what order, and by what method. They ardently desired to have their respective subjects made equal to Latin, Greek, and Mathematics in weight and influence in the schools; but they knew that educational tradition was adverse to this desire, and that many teachers and directors of education felt no confidence in these subjects as disciplinary material. (Emphasis added.)

### **HOW MUCH TIME TO ALLOCATE TO VARIOUS SUBJECTS?**

In an era prior to the Carnegie Unit, allocation of time for various subjects was a constant issue for politically sensitive administrators.



The allotment of time is a very important matter of administrative detail; but it presents great difficulties, requires a comprehensive survey of the comparative claims of many subjects, and in different parts of the country is necessarily affected by the various local conditions and historical developments.

A concrete example of the politics of time allocation is revealed in this passage:

It might have been expected that every Conference would have demanded for its subject a larger proportion of time than is now commonly assigned to it in primary and secondary schools; but, as a matter of fact, the reports are noteworthy for their moderation in this respect—especially the reports on the old and well established subjects. The Latin Conference declares that—“In view of the just demand for more and better

work in several other subjects of the preparatory course, it seemed clear to the Conference that no increase in the quantity of the preparation in Latin should be asked for.”

Some believe that a new trend in curriculum is to present content to students at an ever younger age as seen by elementary educators at the Kindergarten and first grade levels. Perhaps that is not such a new trend.

Anyone who reads these nine reports consecutively will be struck with the fact that all these bodies of experts desire to have the elements of their several subjects taught earlier than they now are; and that the Conferences on all the subjects except the languages desire to have given in the elementary schools what may be called perspective views, or broad surveys, of their respective subjects—expecting that in later years of the school course parts of these same subjects will be taken up with more amplitude and detail.

### **HAVE SOME THINGS REMAINED THE SAME?**

Complaints about the quality of education at levels below those at which we teach may not be new.

As things now are, the high school teacher finds in the

pupils fresh from the grammar schools no foundation of elementary mathematical conceptions outside of arithmetic; no acquaintance with algebraic language; and no accurate knowledge of geometrical forms.

The college teacher of history finds in like manner that his subject has never taken any serious hold on the minds of pupils fresh from the secondary schools. He finds that they have devoted astonishingly little time to the subject; and that they have acquired no habit of historical investigation, or of the comparative examination of different historical narratives concerning the same periods or events.

## **CURRICULUM INTEGRATION IN 1893**

The idea of curriculum integration across content areas seemed new and radical to me when I was a beginning teacher in 1968, but such is not the case.

If the nine Conferences had sat all together as a single body, instead of sitting as detached and even isolated bodies, they could not have more forcibly expressed their conviction that every subject recommended for introduction into elementary and secondary schools should help every other; and that the teacher of each single subject should feel

responsible for the advancement of the pupils in all subjects, and should distinctly contribute to this advancement. (Emphasis added.)

who are going to college, for those who are going to a scientific school, and for those who, presumably, are going to neither?

**Curriculum integration across content areas seemed new and radical to me when I was a beginning teacher in 1968, but such is not the case.**

## **A CORE CURRICULUM FOR ALL OR DIFFERENTIATION OF INSTRUCTION?**

But what should be done for students who do not go to college? Should there be a differentiation of instruction for such students? Perhaps it will help if we recall that in Europe tracking was an established practice such that at the end of primary school, students were assigned to different secondary programs that prepared students for universities, technical schools, or apprenticeships. Often such tracking was correlated with social class. Today the argument is made that the “core” program (four years of English, three years each of math, science, and social studies) should be the same for all. Is this approach to ensure equality of opportunity for all a new idea?

Here is another look at questions seven and eight:

7. Should the subject be treated differently for pupils

8. At what age should this differentiation begin, if any be recommended?

The 7th question is answered unanimously in the negative by the Conferences, and the 8th therefore needs no answer.

The Committee of Ten unanimously agree with the Conferences. Ninety-eight teachers, intimately concerned either with the actual work of American secondary schools, or with the results of that work as they appear in students who come to college, unanimously declare that every subject which is taught at all in a secondary school should be taught in the same way and to the same extent to every pupil so long as he pursues it, no matter what the probable destination of the pupil may be, or at what point his education is to cease. (Emphasis added.)

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

Advocates of improving our schools often call for better trained teachers and ongoing professional development for current teachers. Have things changed much over the past century?

Persons who read all the appended reports will observe the frequent occurrence of the statement that, in order to introduce the changes recommended, teachers more highly trained will be needed in both the elementary and the secondary schools.

As you read the following passage, you may wish to reflect on the Iowa Professional Development Model, especially with respect to the third recommendation.

For the further instruction of teachers in actual service, three agencies already in existence may be much better utilized than they now are.

The Summer Schools which many universities now maintain might be resorted to by much larger numbers of teachers, particularly if some aid, such as the payment of tuition fees and traveling expenses, should be given to teachers who are willing to devote half of their vacations to study, by the



cities and towns which these teachers serve.

Secondly, in all the towns and cities in which colleges and universities are planted, these colleges or

universities may usefully give stated courses of instruction in the main subjects used in the elementary and secondary schools to teachers employed in those towns and cities. This is a reasonable service which the colleges and universities may render to their own communities.

Thirdly, a superintendent who has himself become familiar with the best mode of teaching any one of the subjects which enter into the school course can always be a very useful instructor for the whole body of teachers under his charge. A real master of any one subject will always have many suggestions to make to teachers of other subjects. The same is true of the principal of a high school, or other leading teacher in a town or city. In every considerable city school system the best teacher in each department of instruction should be enabled to give part of his time to helping the other teachers by inspecting and criticizing their work, and showing them, both by precept and example, how to do it better. (Emphasis added.)

The terms “inspecting and criticizing” were the 1893 terms for “clinical supervision,” although today there may be more of an emphasis on “professional conversations” and less emphasis on “telling and selling.”

## FOUR YEARS OF ENGLISH FOR ALL WAS NEW IN 1893

In 1893, the study of English was not as highly regarded as the study of Latin and Greek. A tradition that emphasized the development “discipline” or “mental muscle” by learning classical languages rather than modern languages exerted a strong influence.

The Conference are of the opinion that English should be pursued in the high school during the entire course of four years; but in making this recommendation the Conference have in mind both study of literature and training in the expression of thought. To the study of rhetoric they assign one hour a week in the third year of the high school course. To the subject of historical and systematic grammar they assign one hour a week in the fourth year of the high school course.

The intelligent reader of the report of this Conference will find described in it the means by which the study of English in secondary schools is to be made the equal of any other study in disciplinary or

developing power. The Conference claim for English as much time as the Latin Conference claim for Latin in secondary schools; and it is clear that they intend that the study shall be in all respects as serious and informing as the study of Latin.

One of the most interesting opinions expressed by the Conference is “that the best results in the teaching of English in high schools cannot be secured without the aid given by the study of some other language; and that Latin and German, by reason of their fuller inflectional system, are especially suited to this end.”

Reading and writing in the content areas is definitely not a new idea. Nor is the idea of an actual writing examination as part of the college admission process.

In the case of high schools, as well as in schools of lower grade, the Conference declare that every teacher, whatever his department, should feel responsible for the use of good English on the part of his pupils. In several passages of this report the idea recurs that training in English must go hand in hand with the study of other subjects.

Thus the Conference hope for the study of the history and

geography of the English-speaking people, so far as these illustrate the development of the English language. They mention that “the extent

Conference as to English requirements for admission to colleges and scientific schools are especially wise and valuable.

**Questions and issues  
educational leaders face in 2007  
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educational leaders will face in 2093.**



to which the study of the sources of English words can be carried in any school or class will depend on the acquaintance the pupils possess with Latin, French, and German.” They say that the study of words should be so pursued as to illustrate the political, social, intellectual, and religious development of the English race; and they urge that the admission of a student to college should be made to depend largely on his ability to write English, as shown in his examination books on other subjects. (Emphasis added.)

It is a fundamental idea in this report that the study of every other subject should contribute to the pupil’s training in English; and that the pupil’s capacity to write English should be made available, and be developed, in every other department. The very specific recommendations of the

### **PREPARATION FOR LIFE OR PREPARATION FOR COLLEGE?**

There may be evidence of some change in the role of secondary schools as preparation for college during the past 100 years as our leaders call for all students to be ready for post-secondary education. The percent of youth who completed a secondary school program was “insignificant” in 1893.

The secondary schools of the United States, taken as a whole, do not exist for the purpose of preparing boys and girls for colleges. Only an insignificant percentage of the graduates of these schools go to colleges or scientific schools. Their main function is to prepare for the duties of life that small proportion of all the children in the country—a proportion small in number, but very important to the welfare of the nation—who

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show themselves able to profit by an education prolonged to the eighteenth year, and whose parents are able to support them while they remain so long at school.

There are, to be sure, a few private or endowed secondary schools in the country, which make it their principal object to prepare students for the colleges and universities; but the number of these schools is relatively small.

As early as 1893 there was a call for a national curriculum, one that would prepare all students for life in our democracy. Our concept of “responsible, productive citizen” is embedded in the thinking of the Committee.

A secondary school program intended for national use must therefore be made for those children whose education is not to be pursued beyond the secondary school. The preparation of a few pupils for college or scientific school should in the ordinary secondary school be the incidental, and not the principal object.

As leaders in Iowa consider changes in college admissions policies for the public universities, we should remember that this question has been addressed in the past as well, but perhaps with a different answer than the top fifty percent of the class or a scoring index.

At the same time, it is obviously desirable that the colleges and scientific schools should be accessible to all boys or girls who have completed creditably the secondary school course. Their parents often do not decide for them, four years before the college age, that they shall go to college, and they themselves may not, perhaps, feel the desire to continue their education until near the end of their school course.

In order that any successful graduate of a good secondary school should be free to present himself at the gates of the college or scientific school of his choice, it is necessary that the colleges and scientific schools of the country should accept for admission to appropriate courses of their instruction the attainments of any youth who has passed creditably through a good secondary school course, no matter to what group of subjects he may have mainly devoted himself in the secondary school. (Emphasis added.)

The Conferences on Geography and Modern Languages make the most explicit statement to the effect that college requirements for admission should coincide with high-school requirements for graduation. (Emphasis added.)

The Conference on English is of opinion “that no student should be admitted to college who shows in his English examination and his other examinations that he is very deficient in ability to write good English.” This recommendation suggests that an ample English course in the secondary school should be required of all persons who intend to enter college.

One of the conclusions of the report is taken as self-evident today:

... close articulation between the secondary schools and the higher institutions would be advantageous alike for the schools, the colleges, and the country.

Whether the issue is “redesigning the high school” or “redesigning the college/university,” the questions and issues educational leaders face in 2007 will be the same questions educational leaders will face in 2093. It may be another case of “Déjà vu all over again.”

## REFERENCES

Eliot, C.W., Chair (1893). Report of the Committee of Ten, National Education Association. Retrieved December 19, 2006, from <http://tmh.floonet.net/books/commofTEN/mainrpt.html>.

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*If we have to have an exam at 11, let us make it one for humour, sincerity, imagination, character—and where is the examiner who could test such qualities?*

—A. S. Neill

*Examinations are formidable even to the best prepared, for the greatest fool may ask more than the wisest man can answer.*

—C. C. Colton

## MOVING AHEAD

The February issue of *Iowa Educational Leadership*, a separate flyer, and the Iowa ASCD listserv all included a questionnaire about the future of *Iowa Educational Leadership*. Thanks to those who responded to our survey regarding preference mode for receiving our journal. This issue is hard copy and it can also be found on the IASCD website. **We plan to continue to offer you both versions into the future.**

The Iowa ASCD web site was incorrectly stated in the February 2007 flyer and issue of *Iowa Educational Leadership*. The correct address is <http://iowa.ascd.org>.

We regret this error and apologize for any inconvenience it caused.

## *Iowa ASCD*

### Our Beliefs

**Responsive**—to others  
**Proactive**—leading others  
**Collaborative**—seeking others  
**Professional**—acting with integrity  
**Committed to excellence**