

JUNIUS L. MERIAM'S UNIVERSITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVAILING INTERPRETATIONS OF CURRICULUM  
THEORIES AND PRACTICES PAST AND PRESENT

by

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(Under the Direction of William G. Wraga)

ABSTRACT

Junius L. Meriam's (1872-1960) work as a progressive educator remains overlooked by today's educational historians. A critic of highly traditional teaching methods, Meriam also opposed progressive practices that advocated the abolishment of traditional subject matter. Instead, he encouraged using activities appropriate to children's interests to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. He put his theory into practice as Professor of Education at the University of Missouri from 1905 until 1924, during which time he directed the work of the university-sponsored elementary school.

This study reconstructs Junius L. Meriam's work at University Elementary School, explores the implications of Meriam's work for an understanding of early twentieth century progressive education, and explores the implications of Meriam's

work for curriculum practice today. This study utilizes historical research, a collection and evaluation of data intended to describe, explain, and comprehend actions or events of the past. The reconstruction of Meriam's work not only elucidates the past by exploring the implications of the work for the prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education, but also reveals whether a correlation exists between past and current curriculum theories and practices.

Meriam's work at University Elementary school demonstrated a curriculum that focused on the needs of children without regard to their future plans. Even while enabling children to live more efficiently as children, however, the curriculum was preparing them for the future. While today's schools might not be able to implement the same curriculum that Meriam implemented at University Elementary School, his principles could be the foundation for the development of a curriculum appropriate for today's society. Students could pursue topics in which they are interested and might have a better idea about what they would like to do when they graduate from high school. Regardless of whether one sees the purpose of education as preparation for the future or enabling students to live better lives while they are students, a curriculum based on Meriam's principles fulfills the purpose.

INDEX WORDS: Meriam, Junius L.; University Elementary School;  
Progressive movement; Progressive education; Curriculum theory;  
Curriculum practice

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Edith Chidester, who has always championed my efforts in personal, academic, and professional endeavors, and to my fiancé Jason, an extraordinary individual who patiently encouraged and supported me through every obstacle I encountered on this final leg of my journey.

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Despite Junius L. Meriam's (1872-1960) devotion of most of his professional life to the improvement of elementary education through his research and experimentation in instructional methods and curriculum, his work as a progressive educator remains overlooked by today's educational historians. A critic of highly traditional teaching methods, Meriam also opposed progressive practices that advocated the abolishment of traditional subject matter. Instead, he encouraged using activities appropriate to children's interests to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. He put his theory into practice as Professor of Education at the University of Missouri from 1905 until 1924, during which time he directed the work of the university-sponsored elementary school. In addition to his work at the University of Missouri, he engaged in similar work in the Francis Parker School in San Diego, California; the Glendora Foot-hills School in Glendora, California; the La Jolla School in Placentia, California; and the Garfield School in Santa Monica, California (University of California History Digital Archives, 1962). He ended his career in 1943, retiring from his position as Professor of Education at the University of

California, Los Angeles, a position he had held since he left the University of Missouri in 1924 (University of California History Digital Archives, 1962). Notwithstanding historians' oversight of Junius Meriam, the theory he put into practice through his research and experimentation and the results he achieved have potential implications for prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education as well as for current curriculum practice.

#### Background of the Problem

In "Curriculum Theory and Change: What Can We Learn from History?" Reid (1986) suggested, "Curriculum History will not be objective in the way that History has conventionally claimed to be: by surrendering that spurious objectivity it may become a truer guide to the understanding of curriculum change" (p. 82). Unfortunately, many educational historians demonstrate an inability, or perhaps an unwillingness, to surrender that "spurious objectivity." Stories of the progressive education movement stand as testimony to historians' spurious objectivity. Cremin (1961) related one such story in The Transformation of the School:

. . . John Dewey . . . awakes one night with a new vision of the American school: the vision is progressive education. Over the years, with the help of a dedicated group of crafty professional lieutenants at Teachers College, Columbia University,

he is able to foist the vision on an unsuspecting American people. The story usually ends with a plea for exorcising of this devil from our midst and a return to the ways of fathers. (p. viii)

According to Cremin (1961), this kind of "morality play" has held popularity in American politics with both reformers and conservatives, but it should not be confused with history.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, schools were experiencing changes similar to the changes schools of today are experiencing as a result of rapid advancements in technology, changing life styles, and the large number of immigrants (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999). Cremin (1961) asserted that progressive education began as an effort to use the school to improve the lives of individuals by applying the ideal of democracy to the urban-industrial civilization engendered during the latter half of the nineteenth century. This meant four things to progressive educators:

First, it meant broadening the program and function of the school to include direct concern for health, vocation, and the quality of family and community life.

Second, it meant applying in the classroom the pedagogical principles derived from new scientific research in psychology and the social sciences.

Third, it meant tailoring instruction more and more to the different kinds and classes of children who were being brought within the purview of the school.

Finally, Progressivism implied the radical faith that culture could be democratized without being vulgarized, the faith that everyone could share not

only in the benefits of the new sciences but in the pursuit of the arts as well. (Cremin, 1961, p. viii)

Throughout its history, different people interpreted the progressive movement in different ways, and the diversity of American education only compounded the different interpretations. Consequently, even though the progressive movement in education comprised a critical period in the history of American education, it was "marked from the very beginning by a pluralistic, frequently contradictory, character" (Cremin, 1961, p. x). Despite the fact that Progressives shared no common view of progressive education, historians often assert Progressives agreed "that their common enemy was the traditional academic curriculum" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60). According to Semel & Sadovnik (1999), John Dewey, who is considered the father of progressivism, placed emphasis on the need for the curriculum to relate to the interests and needs of the learner, but he did not reject traditional subject matter. Rather, he regarded an integrated curriculum the most effective way to balance traditional disciplines with the interests and needs of the learner. Even though Dewey inspired the progressive movement, unfortunately, other progressive educators often "misread, misunderstood, and misinterpreted" him (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 9). Consequently, not all progressive ideas remained loyal to Dewey's intentions (Ravitch, 2000).

### Significance of the Study

Junius L. Meriam, one progressive educator who did remain loyal to Dewey's ideas, "took a position identifiably more militant toward conventional subject matter than Dewey did," but he did not neglect subject matter (Wraga, 2001, p. 36). He organized his curriculum around children's experiences and integrated the traditional subject matter necessary to teach the concepts. The theory Meriam put into practice through his research and experimentation and the results he achieved at University Elementary School potentially impact the prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education as well as current curriculum practice. A reconstruction of Meriam's work at University Elementary School reveals his theory and practice and allows the researcher to make comparisons with other early twentieth century progressive theories and practices, comparisons that are likely to reveal significant differences.

In their "spurious objectivity" historians have virtually overlooked Meriam's work. For example, in The Transformation of the School, Cremin (1961) presented a history of the progressive education movement from 1876-1957, a movement in which Meriam played a major role, yet he mentioned Meriam only twice. He first referred to Meriam's University Elementary School as one of the schools praised by the Deweys in Schools of To-Morrow,

yet he included no further discussion of the school. Cremin's (1961) second reference to Meriam appears as a biographical note at the end of the book: "As might be expected, the studies of individual ventures vary considerably in character and quality; among the better are Junius L. Meriam: Child Life and the Curriculum (1920) . . ." (p. 381). While he admitted the quality of Meriam's work, he included no further discussion.

Taking a more comprehensive approach, Tanner & Tanner (1990), in History of the School Curriculum, discussed American education from 1642-1989. Only through careful reading of the unarguably comprehensive history, however, will one find in a short section discussing "other educational reformers" the mention of Meriam's work: "Particularly interesting are the programs of the Elementary School at the University of Missouri, where the curriculum was organized on the bases of observation, play, stories, and handwork . . ." (Tanner & Tanner, 1990, p. 133). Of course, because Tanner & Tanner (1990) offered no further discussion of Meriam's work, the reader cannot determine what they meant by "interesting."

In his preface to The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958, Kliebard (1995) explained that the sixty-five year time span his book covers "encompasses a period of intense activity in curriculum matters—actually when curriculum reform emerged from somewhat tentative beginnings to become a national

preoccupation" (p. xvi). In his discussion of curriculum reforms, Kliebard (1995) included William Heard Kilpatrick's promotion of the project method as a curriculum. Kliebard (1995) also included a list of books on the topic of the project method, all of which appeared in the 1920s. Of course, Kilpatrick's (1925) Foundations of Method claimed a place on the list, as did Meriam's (1920) Child Life and the Curriculum. Kliebard (1995) introduced this list: "With such discipleship, it was inevitable that the impact of the project curriculum should be felt in school practice . . ." (p. 144). Rather than discussing any individual work, Kliebard (1995) limited his discussion to a statement about the body of work in general.

In Changing Schools, Zilversmit (1993) took yet a more limited approach and discussed the theory and practice of progressive education from 1930-1960. Zilversmit (1993) did, however, include some historical perspective on the progressive education movement. In doing so, he discussed some of Meriam's peers, William Heard Kilpatrick and George Counts, in particular. Zilversmit (1993) also discussed theories such as the child-centered curriculum, meeting the needs of the "whole child," and allowing students to play an active role in deciding the content of their education (p. 18). Although his discussion of these theories provided an opportunity to discuss how Meriam put his curriculum into practice at University Elementary

School, which ended in 1924, as well as the work he continued for another nineteen years in various schools, Zilversmit (1993) failed to mention him at all.

In their introduction to "Schools of Tomorrow," Schools of Today, Semel & Sadovnik (1999) explained that the title of the book "evokes John and Evelyn Dewey's 1915 book, Schools of To-Morrow" (p. 1). Semel & Sadovnik (1999) documented some of the child-centered progressive schools of the early twentieth century, including three schools the Deweys included in their book. Because the Deweys included Meriam's University Elementary School in Schools of To-Morrow, one might reasonably expect Semel & Sadovnik (1999) to include it in "Schools of Tomorrow," Schools of Today. Despite the Deweys' praise of Meriam's school, however, Semel & Sadovnik (1999) made no mention of Meriam's work or Meriam's book, which resulted from that work.

Ironically, Ravitch (2000), the historian who has so far devoted the most discussion to Meriam, argued that the important strands of the progressive movement—those which had the most influence on public education—naturally resulted in "anti-intellectualism," and she used Meriam's school as one such example (p.16). Ravitch (2000) claimed that in Meriam's school "adult purposes and subject matter virtually disappeared" (p. 91). However, in Child Life and the Curriculum, Meriam (1920) stated, "Such details of arithmetic, language, and geography are

properly concrete only when they function in the real experience of people, when that experience is of primary importance and these details of arithmetic, language, and geography are instruments in contributing to the effectiveness of that experience" (p. 172). Certainly, Meriam did not advocate using traditional instructional methods to teach the academic curriculum; neither did he, however, resolutely spurn subject matter as Ravitch (2000) asserted. A determination of Meriam's treatment of subject matter, as well as the instructional methods he utilized, results through systematic study of his work.

A study of Meriam's work at University Elementary School provides a history of only a single school, but that history potentially holds some answers to recurring questions and emphasizes themes in reform movements—movements beginning in the early twentieth century and continuing today. Meriam (1920) himself found enough significance in his work to publish the results in Child Life and the Curriculum. In his preface, Meriam (1920) explained, "the University Elementary School at Columbia, Missouri, has exhibited a very considerable amount of modern school practice that warrants the critical consideration of school officials, school teachers, and school communities" (p. vii). A history of Meriam's school provides such consideration, but with the benefit of historical hindsight. Labaree (1988)

also published a case of study of a single school, Central High School of Philadelphia, the purpose of which "provides insight into the institutional development of the high school and the role of politics and markets in this process" (p. 3). Such studies demonstrate the significance of a history of a single school for its potential to build on past work, better understand current trends, and develop new policies and practices.

When combined with the histories of other progressive schools, a history of a single school becomes even more significant. Dewey & Dewey's (1915) Schools of To-Morrow demonstrates an example of such a collection, as does Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) "Schools of Tomorrow," Schools of Today. In the preface to Schools of To-Morrow, Dewey & Dewey (1915) explained the primary purpose of the book: "We have hoped to suggest to the reader the practical meaning of some of the more widely recognized and accepted views of educational reformers by showing what happens when a teacher applies these views" (p. i). Clearly, as the "father of progressivism," Dewey focused on the progressive movement and its implications at the time. Educators today, however, cannot afford to embark on reform movements without first looking to the past. Through their examination of both progressive schools of the past and contemporary progressive schools, Semel & Sadovnik (1999) argued that

"contemporary progressive educational reforms have their origins in the early child-centered schools" and "progressive education is alive and well . . ." (p. 376). Consequently, a history of a single school like University Elementary School makes it clear that the past offers much to teach the present about "new education," a phrase originally applied to progressive education in the early twentieth century. As Semel & Sadovnik (1999) asserted, "It is time that educational reformers and practitioners stop reinventing the wheel" (p. 376). Before developing and implementing "new" educational reforms, educators need to examine past reform movements to determine what worked, what failed, and why.

Even though this study of Meriam's work focuses on the University Elementary School rather than on his entire life, it also holds significance for its potential as a part of a prosopography, or collective biography, of progressivism. Cunningham (2001) asserted the increasing need for educational history to concentrate attention on the "anonymous practitioner," strengthening his proposal for a prosopography of progressivism (p. 436). "A survey of literature of progressivism reveals a dearth of teachers, . . . and in working towards the idea of a prosopography of progressivism we need to focus on more examples [of teachers]" (Cunningham, 2001, p. 447). The annals of curriculum history include obscure practitioners for whom a

prosopography of progressivism would provide documentation (Cunningham, 2001). In light of how overlooked his work has been, Meriam certainly qualifies as an obscure practitioner. Ultimately, a prosopography of progressivism would reveal a more accurate composite of the curriculum past, discrediting the specious interpretations, not only of Meriam's work, but the work of many other progressive educators. If not dispelled, these specious interpretations prevent contemporary education specialists from considering any part of his theory or practice in implementing curriculum change.

#### Statement of Purpose

This study purposes to reconstruct Junius L. Meriam's work at University Elementary School, sponsored by the University of Missouri; to explore the implications of Meriam's work for an understanding of early twentieth century progressive education; and to explore the implications of Meriam's work for curriculum practice today.

#### Research Questions

The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What were the predominant theories of early twentieth century progressive education?

2. What are the prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education?
3. What was Meriam's theory regarding instructional methods and curriculum?
4. How did Meriam put his theory into practice at University Elementary School?
5. What were the results of Meriam's experimentation at University Elementary School?
6. To what extent does Meriam's work support prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education?
7. To what extent does Meriam's work contradict prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education?
8. What are the implications of Meriam's work for curriculum practice today?

#### Scope of Study

This study will consist of:

1. a review of predominant theories of early twentieth century progressive education,
2. a review of prevailing interpretations of progressive education in the early twentieth century,

3. an examination of primary sources germane to Meriam's work at University Elementary School,
4. a review of Meriam's interpretations of his work at University Elementary School,
5. a comparison of the primary sources germane to Meriam's work at University Elementary Schools with his own interpretations,
6. an evaluation of Meriam's work in comparison with prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education, and
7. a discussion of implications of the study's findings for current curriculum practice.

### Methodology

This study will utilize historical research, "the systematic collection and evaluation of data to describe, explain, and thereby understand actions or events that occurred sometime in the past" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996, p. 495). According to Fraenkel & Wallen (1996), historical research serves several purposes: It makes the researcher aware of the past so he can learn from it, helps the researcher determine whether past methods might correlate with current problems and practices, allows the researcher to test hypotheses concerning relationships and trends and make predictions, and helps the

researcher better understand current educational practices and policies. This study endeavors to serve at least three of these purposes. The reconstruction of Meriam's work not only elucidates the past by exploring the implications of the work for the prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education, but also reveals whether a correlation exists between past and current curriculum theories and practices, ultimately leading to a better understanding of current curriculum practices and policies.

Fraenkel & Wallen (1996) explicated four steps involved in historical research: defining the problem, locating sources, summarizing and evaluating information, and interpreting and presenting the information in relation to the problem being investigated. In this study, the researcher investigates the work of Meriam with the belief that the theory he put into practice through his research and experimentation and the results he achieved have underlying implications for prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education as well as for current curriculum practice. The investigation of Meriam's work allows the researcher to exploit primary resources, resources prepared by participants or direct witnesses, which Fraenkel and Wallen (1996) recommended. Fortunately, primary sources relating to Meriam's work are preserved in the archives at the University of Missouri;

consequently, the researcher has access to, at the very least, documents and numerical records. Often, however, the researcher must rely on secondary sources, documents prepared by an individual who obtained his description of the event from another person (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996). Because historians have overlooked Meriam's work for the most part, few secondary sources about his work exist. At least one secondary source focusing on Meriam's (1920) work exists—his own book, Child Life and the Curriculum, an explanation of his research and experimentation and interpretation of the results. Using Meriam's own explanation and interpretation, however, presents an obvious problem in its lack of objectivity. The researcher, however, will use secondary sources by early twentieth century educators who championed the predominant theories of progressive education, in particular, Dewey (1900, 1902, 1916), Dewey & Dewey (1915), Kilpatrick (1918), Charters (1924, 1971), and Bobbitt (1912, 1918, 1924). The research will also use sources that assert prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education, including, but not limited to, Cremin (1961), Tanner & Tanner (1990), Kliebard (1995), Zilversmit (1993), Semel & Sadovnik (1999), and Ravitch (2000).

The last two steps of historical research—summarizing and evaluating the information, and interpreting and presenting the information—involve making generalizations. In fact, Kaestle

(1997) discussed the idea that historical research is part science and part art because the researcher must make generalizations about the past or judgments about the relationship of the past to the present. He suggested that generalization is an act of creative interpretation because it involves the researcher's values, interests, and training. Therefore, even though historical research involves evidence, it remains somewhat subjective. Consequently, historical generalizations are not beyond dispute. Kaestle (1997) argued that it is important for the researcher to understand the problematic nature of historical research because beliefs about the historical role of education play a part in present-day politics. Historians' oversight of Meriam's work serves as an example of the problematic nature of historical research. By its fundamental nature, Meriam's work necessitates inquiry for a more accurate understanding of early twentieth century progressive education, yet historians have virtually ignored Meriam and his work in shaping their interpretations. Reconstruction of Meriam's work offers a better understanding of early twentieth century progressive education; that understanding, in turn, could suggest implications for current curriculum practice.

According to Fraenkel & Wallen (1996), the researcher must also be cognizant of the advantages and disadvantages that are

inherent in historical research. A primary advantage of historical research is that the researcher can study problems that no other methodology allows because it uses evidence from the past as that evidence relates to present-day problems and practices (Frankel & Wallen, 1996). This study of Meriam's work seeks to clarify theories and practices of early twentieth century progressive education with the belief that the practices might contribute to the improvement of current practices. Historical research also utilizes a larger number of different types of evidence than other methodologies (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996). Unfortunately, the major disadvantage in historical research is the absence of a method to control for threats to validity, which places great emphasis on the competence and probity of the researcher (Frankel & Wallen, 1996). The sundry interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education clearly demonstrate this disadvantage.

Because this study focuses primarily on the work of one man, the methodology expands to include—to some extent—biography. Using the biographical method offers the researcher the opportunity to gain insight into curriculum theories and practices of the early twentieth century. Biographical methodology necessitates an investigation of the origin of Meriam's theories. More importantly, it requires examination of the primary sources involved in and resulting from Meriam's

work. This examination allows the researcher to draw conclusions about the relationship between Meriam's work and the work of other progressive educators (as reported through secondary sources). Ultimately, biographical studies reveal more than an individual's history: Biography can provide a documentary framework within which to evaluate curriculum theories and practices of the past as well as their implications for current curriculum practice (Finkelstein, 1998).

Certainly, as Marius (1999) suggested, researchers need to be mindful in suggesting what history can reveal about the present and the future. However, Marius (1999) also stated, "Our times and our thoughts are shaped by the past. That shaping is why we study history" (p. 7). Indeed, educational leaders should review the literature and make themselves aware of the history of educational theories, policies, and practices before implementing any type of curriculum reform. If educators are mindful of what has happened in the past, they can learn from past success and failures. All too often, Fraenkel & Wallen (1996) pointed out, when educational leaders propose some radical innovation, all they are doing is reinventing the wheel. Historical research, then, allows educators to build upon past work, affords them a better understanding of current educational trends, and helps them formulate new curriculum policies and practices.

### Assumptions

The following assumptions apply to this study:

1. Review of Meriam's work, both the primary sources and his interpretations thereof, can facilitate the analysis of prevailing interpretations of theories of early twentieth century progressive education.
2. The primary source documents are authentic.
3. Historical research holds the potential not only to further comprehension of past educational practice but also to enlighten current educational practice.

### Limitations of the Study

This study purposes to reconstruct the work of Meriam's University Elementary School, sponsored by the University of Missouri; to explore the implications of Meriam's work for an understanding of early twentieth century progressive education; and to explore the implications of Meriam's work for curriculum practice today. The study will address Meriam's theory of education, how he put his theory into practice through his research and experimentation at University Elementary School, and the results he achieved there. This study will not speak to all aspects of Meriam's life; rather, the researcher will limit the topic to Meriam's work with University Elementary School, the implications his work has on prevailing interpretations of

early twentieth century progressive education, and the implications of his work for current curriculum practice.

In addition to the limitations the researcher places on the study, circumstances beyond the control of the researcher pose restrictions as well. While the archives at the University of Missouri hold primary sources relating to and resulting from Meriam's work at University Elementary School, the researcher has no way to verify the completeness of the sources. Additionally, Meriam and his wife assembled the sources, creating the question of the objectivity of the collection.

#### Organization of the Report

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study, which includes the introduction, background of the problem, significance of the study, statement of purpose, scope of study, research questions, methodology, assumptions, limitations of the study, and organization of the report.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature of the predominant theories of early twentieth century progressive education, focusing on Dewey, Kilpatrick, Charters, and Bobbitt.

Chapter 3 reviews the prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education, including, but not limited to, Cremin (1961), Tanner & Tanner (1990), Kliebard

(1995), Zilversmit (1993), Semel & Sadovnik(1999), and Ravitch (2000).

Chapter 4 discusses Meriam's career, including his work at University Elementary School as well as his work in the Francis Parker School in San Diego, California; the Glendora Foot-hills School in Glendora, California; the La Jolla School in Placentia, California; and the Garfield School in Santa Monica, California. Additionally, Chapter 4 discusses Meriam's theory of education.

Chapter 5 reconstructs Meriam's work at University Elementary School at the University of Missouri. The reconstruction includes how he put his theory into practice through his research and experimentation at University Elementary School and the results of his work.

Chapter 6 analyzes Meriam's work with respect to prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education. The analysis reveals to what extent Meriam's work supports and/or contradicts the prevailing interpretations.

Chapter 7 summarizes the findings and reveals implications for current curriculum practice.

CHAPTER 2  
PREDOMINANT THEORIES OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY PROGRESSIVE  
EDUCATION

In this chapter, some general principles of the Progressive movement, a course of social and political reform triggered by radical changes that began in the second half of the nineteenth century, will be discussed. The idea of progressive education, which "viewed education as an adjunct to politics in realizing the promise of American life," began as a part of the Progressive movement (Cremin, 1961, p. 88). Additionally, three predominant curriculum theories of early twentieth century progressive education will be discussed. The discussion of these general principles and theories will provide the background necessary for analysis of Meriam's work at University Elementary School and its potential impact on prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education. Though many theories of progressive education arose throughout the Progressive movement, the theories of four specific progressive educators—John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick, John Franklin Bobbitt, and Werrett Wallace Charters—will be the focus of the discussion.

Many social and political changes occurred during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Tanner & Tanner (1990) explicated several factors that contributed to these changes. A momentous influence, Charles Darwin's (1859) Origin of the Species, along with the ensuing advances in science and technology, shook the basis of supernatural explanations of humanity and the universe, supplanting them with naturalistic explanations. Additionally, the number of immigrants rose, creating a surge of culturally diverse people looking for opportunities not available in their homelands. Furthermore, agricultural ingenuity moderated labor in subsistence farming, giving rise to urbanization.

As new ideas of man and society came to the vanguard, Cremin (1961) explained, education became an integral factor. Development in scientific thought regarding the human race and the universe strengthened the democratic social belief of "a humanity committed to progress through the unleashing of intelligence, as opposed to the old traditions and the imposition of authority" (Tanner & Tanner, 1990, pp. 328-329). Accordingly, Cremin (1961) explicated, educators developed theories of a "new education," theories that envisioned using the school to improve the lives of individuals by applying the ideal of democracy to the urban-industrial civilization engendered during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Educators built theories on a principle that encouraged developing a curriculum based on the scientific method and problem solving, supporting the idea of education as development from within. Not all progressive educators interpreted this principle the same way, however, and by the turn of the nineteenth century, there existed a growing number of theories to support the reform that progressive educators championed (Cremin, 1961). The different interpretations of the progressive principles become evident in an analysis of the various theories. Examination of the theories of Dewey, Kilpatrick, Bobbitt, and Charters explicates the nuances in their interpretations of the progressive theory, making more obvious complexity of that theory.

#### John Dewey's Theory

According to Tanner & Tanner (1990), the works of John Dewey, who methodically studied the need to restructure the school curriculum to correlate with the changing nature of knowledge and the ideals of a democratic society, exemplified the new perception. In 1896, John Dewey opened at the University of Chicago an experimental school with the intention of testing his educational theories. He hoped to learn how a school could become a collaborative community while allowing individuals to develop their own abilities and satisfy their own needs. Dewey

hypothesized that the focus of the curriculum should be life itself and that a necessary condition for growth was freedom of expression, albeit under the guidance of a teacher. He desired children to have the same natural interest in school as they have in their activities at home. Dewey & Dewey (1915) asserted that education was not something to be forced on children; rather, it was the development of abilities with which people are born.

Dewey & Dewey (1915) believed that educators made a mistake in forgetting that learning necessarily occurred when the learner dealt with real situations, assuming even that the mind was indisposed to learning. Teaching practices supported this assumption, with teachers often having to coax or bully students into having anything to do with learning. These teaching practices valued accumulating information for the purpose of answering questions. Instead, the purpose of teaching was to guide natural growth, stressing "the need of intimate and extensive personal acquaintance with a small number of typical situations with a view to mastering the way of dealing with the problems of experience, not piling up information" (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 13).

Dewey's theory of curriculum argued that there were no permanent truths. His theory asserted that the needs and interests of the child in the classroom should be a priority for

educators and that the child should participate in planning his or her course of study (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999). Necessarily, Dewey (1902) advocated discarding the view of subject matter as fixed and separate from the child's experience. He based his methodology on the idea that children were "active, organic beings, growing and changing," so they required a course of study commensurate with their particular stage of development (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 6). He asserted that anything considered a study—regardless of subject matter—should derive from materials that "fall within the scope of ordinary life-experience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 73). He illustrated this idea with example of the natural physical and intellectual growth of a child. The infant, Dewey (1938) explained, began in an environment restricted by space and time. The "intrinsic subject-matter of experience" expanded as the baby learned to "reach, creep, walk, and talk" (Dewey, 1938, p. 74). The resulting realization, he contended, is

that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process. Just as two points define a straight line, so the present standpoint of the child and the facts and truths of studies define instruction. It is continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies. (Dewey, 1902, p. 189)

Dewey (1938) concluded that a child's induction into formal education should begin with abilities the child developed as a

result of his growth from infancy. He explained that such a child-centered curriculum supported interpreting the child's feelings, inclinations, and deeds to determine whether they were "signs of a waning tendency," to which one would not give encouragement; "a culminating power and interest," which one would select and exploit; or "the dawning of flickering light that will shine steadily only in the far future," to which one would give a chance and wait for a definite direction in the future (Dewey, 1902, p. 192).

Kliebard (1995) maintained that Dewey's treatment of subject matter, which meshed naturally with his treatment of the learner, departed dramatically from the traditional curriculum. Dewey believed that the most effective method of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic—the three R's—occurred within the context of the child's experience. He perceived the child's experience as crucial and burgeoning (Dewey, 1902). He stated, "The child is the starting-point, the center, and the end" (Dewey, 1902, p. 187). He explained that subject matter was an instrument of growth and that self-realization, not knowledge or information, was the goal: "To the growth of the child all studies are subservient; they are instruments valued as they serve the needs of growth" (Dewey, 1902, p. 187). He further explained that learning started within the child, stating, "Literally, we must take our stand with the child and our

departure from him. It is he and not the subject-matter which determines both quality and quantity of learning" (Dewey, 1902, p. 187). The learner must take an active role, "reaching out of his own mind," rather than having subject matter "got into the child from without" (Dewey, 1902, p. 187). Dewey encouraged both freedom and responsibility for students because both were necessary components of a democratic life (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999). Nonetheless, Dewey (1902) warned against expecting a child to work things out without providing guidance. He cautioned, "Nothing can be developed from nothing; nothing but the crude can be developed out of the crude—and this is what surely happens when we throw the child back upon his achieved self as a finality, and invite him to spin new truths of nature or of conduct out of that" (Dewey, 1902, p. 196). Rather, an educator must carefully choose activities related to existing experiences, experiences that have the potential to present new problems, thus generating critical thinking and expanding the child's experience (Dewey, 1938). "Guidance," as Dewey (1902) defined it, "is not external imposition. It is freeing the life-process for its own most adequate fulfillment" (p. 195).

Dewey's theory considered the nature of society to be entwined with the nature of the subject matter and the nature of the learner. Dewey (1900) criticized traditional education for the child's inability to use at school any experiences he

encountered outside of school as well as the inability to apply in his daily life what he learned at school. Dewey believed that school should mirror the life of society at large, thus eliminating the problem inherent in the traditional school-isolation from reality (Cremin, 1961). Dewey (1900) explained that in progressive education, "All studies grow out of relations in the one great common world. When the child lives in varied but concrete and active relationship to this common world, his studies are naturally unified" (p. 91). He further explained that learning activities at school replicated active community life by developing a spirit of social cooperation and a sense of community. These activities allowed the school to affiliate itself with life. Dewey (1902) said this allowed the school to get "a chance to be a miniature community, an embryonic society" (p. 18). The activities of this embryonic society, he explained, modeled those of society at large (Dewey, 1900). Even more importantly, Dewey's "embryonic society" would improve the larger society (Cremin, 1961). Dewey (1900) explained:

When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious. (p. 29)

Cremin (1961) maintained that Dewey perceived the need of education to increase the breadth of social situations in which individuals recognized concerns, made choices regarding those concerns, and acted upon their choices. He thought schools should instill habits that enabled individuals to change their environment rather than merely adapting to it. Ultimately, Dewey sought to achieve intellectual development through the curriculum because it gave the individual control over his or her surroundings, and intelligent social action offered the most promise for a better society (Kliebard, 1995).

#### William Heard Kilpatrick's Project Method

Over the years, William Heard Kilpatrick has been acclaimed as "the great interpreter and popularizer of Dewey's theories" (Cremin, 1961, p. 215). In the spring of 1918, Kilpatrick wrote an essay titled "The Project Method," which was a theoretical analysis placing "the purposeful act" at the core of the educative process. Indeed, Kilpatrick's project method shared striking similarities with Dewey's theory of curriculum in its concern for children. When Kilpatrick (1918) presented the project method, he warned at the outset that the idea lacked novelty. Ironically, his article turned out to be "the single most dramatic event in the evolution of the movement to reform the curriculum through projects" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 137).

Kilpatrick (1918) explained that it resulted from his perceived need to unify "more completely a number of important related aspects of the educative process" (pp. 319-320). He endeavored to develop a theory that would join the educational psychology and educational philosophy of the day (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). Kilpatrick (1918) admitted his philosophic outlook had made him "suspicious of so-called 'fundamental principles'" (p. 320). He sought a concept that stressed action, "preferably wholehearted vigorous activity," while it allowed for the "adequate utilization of the laws of learning, and no less for the essential elements of the ethical quality of conduct" (Kilpatrick, 1918, p. 320). Kilpatrick (1918) concluded he found the unifying idea he sought in the "conception of wholehearted purposeful activity proceeding in a social environment" (p. 320). By emphasizing purposeful activity, he sought to enhance both direct and associated learning; by locating the activity in a social environment, he thought he could make possible certain moral results (Cremin, 1961). He saw the best assurance of heightened intellectual insight and superior moral judgment in a curriculum reorganized as a succession of projects. He applied the term "project" to this purposeful act (Kilpatrick, 1918). Kilpatrick proposed the project method as a complete theory for curriculum development and the method to

implement that curriculum, which was made up of projects (Tanner & Tanner, 1990).

For Kilpatrick, the project method was not a way of reorganizing the teaching of particular subjects; rather, it was a substitute for the subject (Kliebard, 1995). In this regard, Kilpatrick took a position contrary to Dewey's. While Kilpatrick claimed that supporters of a reorganized curriculum were not unconcerned with subject matter and asserted that they needed it and would use it, his emphasis obviously differed from Dewey's (Zilversmit, 1993). For Dewey (1916), subject matter represented "the essential ingredients of the culture to be perpetuated in . . . an organized form" (p. 214). According to Zilversmit (1993), Dewey believed that teachers needed to understand children, but he believed they first needed a deep understanding of the subject matter. Kilpatrick, on the other hand, required teachers first to love children. Additionally, Dewey believed that as children matured, they were better able to understand subject matter as adults did, so the curriculum could become more subject-centered. Kilpatrick, however, asserted that the process of teaching by activities rather than subjects should replace the subject-centered curriculum of secondary schools.

While Kilpatrick and Dewey held contrary stances with respect to subject matter, they agreed on education's role in social change (Zilversmit, 1993). Cremin (1961) explained that

Kilpatrick reiterated Dewey's argument that the changes in society and the economy brought about by scientific and industrial advances required a complete transformation of the school. While there would always be some continuity, changes would continue, and intelligence was the only guide to dealing with those changes. Consequently, schools needed to teach techniques of scrutinizing and validating truth rather than teaching the truth itself. In other words, schools needed to teach children how to think, not what to think. To do so, schools could not predetermine subject matter; instead, subject matter needed to be the knowledge derived by students in pursuing the activities they had purposed and planned. According to Kliebard (1995), Kilpatrick saw subject matter as a "rich reconstruction of the child's experience" (p. 142). He sought to reintegrate subject matter, or knowledge, into the realm of human action; under these circumstances, subject matter was not to be learned but was to function directly in realizing human purposes.

Kilpatrick believed the project method designed an education that would facilitate a better life by teaching the "business of living" (Cremin, 1961, p. 217). He believed that education should prepare students to meet the "demands for practical efficiency and of moral responsibility," thus presenting the "ideal of democratic citizenship" (Kilpatrick,

1918, p. 322). Kilpatrick (1918) asserted that the "purposeful act is the typical unit of the worthy life," since "purposive activity" rather than "mere drifting" characterizes the worthy life (p. 322). Purposeful activity, therefore, should be the typical unit of school practice. Basing education on purposeful activity, Kilpatrick (1918) explained, identified "the process of education with worthy living itself," merging the two into one (p. 323). While it was acceptable for the child to acknowledge a teacher's suggestion for a project, it was preferable for children to experience the four steps of a project, which included purposing, planning, executing, and judging (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). Because no necessary conflict existed between social demands and the child's interests, practicing well-chosen purposeful acts under the guidance of teachers, while being held accountable for their actions, would prepare students for the "worthy life of the coming day" (Kilpatrick, 1918, p. 323). It was the duty of the teacher to guide the pupil, using the pupil's interests and achievement, "into the wider interests and achievement demanded by wider social life of the older world" (Kilpatrick, 1918, p. 328). Kilpatrick (1918) averred that through the guidance of a skillful teacher, "the children of an embryonic society will make increasingly finer discriminations as to what is right and proper" (p. 328-329). The teacher guided the process of

evaluating the situation, but, ultimately, the teacher achieved success in gradually eliminating himself or herself from the success of the process. In essence, Kilpatrick suggested that the child must make his own curriculum (Tanner & Tanner, 1990).

Kilpatrick (1918) offered the project method as a compromise between the "regime of coercion" of traditional schools and the "foolish humoring of childish whims" of some of the child-centered progressive theories (p. 334). He contended that "wholehearted purposeful activity in a social situation as the typical unit of school procedure" utilized the learner's natural tendency to learn (Kilpatrick, 1918, p. 334). With proper guidance, purposeful activity offered efficiency in reaching the goal of the activity as well as the potential learning within the activity. Additionally, a child's natural sociability combined with a skillful teacher to guide his activity potentially resulted in character building. Kilpatrick (1918) captured the essence of the project method in claiming, "Learning of all kinds and in its all desirable ramifications best proceeds in proportion as wholeheartedness of purpose is present" (p. 334).

#### Theory of Social Efficiency

Despite the work of Dewey, Kilpatrick, and other progressive educators, the various interpretations of the

progressive theory suffered the same criticisms: curriculum fragmentation, the lack of methodical treatment of subject matter, the lack of scope and sequence, and the assumption that the interests of children will result in high-level cognitive outcomes (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). According to Tanner & Tanner (1990), some critics characterized the lack of curriculum design as impractical and ineffective; others characterized it as failing to prepare children in academic work and moral training. A third group criticized the school for its lack of holding power and, consequently, a source of educational waste. A fourth criticism, however, spoke more loudly than the others. Reform economists demanded that schools show measurable results in terms of social improvement or have their funds cut.

Tanner & Tanner (1990) explained that the economic concern for curriculum efficiency led to the Committee on Economy and Time, created by the NEA's Department of Superintendence in 1911. Even though the concept of a useful curriculum was reformist in essence, the committee's plan, an unchanging curriculum with no concern for individual differences, was conservative. Additionally, the committee determined the interests of the child to be insufficient justification for determining the subject matter of the curriculum; instead, subject matter needed to be useful in adulthood, and it was the teacher's job to make it interesting.

According to Cremin (1961), a group of educators followed in the footsteps of the committee and ensued with the analysis of contemporary society as the standard of priority in the curriculum. John Franklin Bobbitt and Werrett Wallace Charters were the two most notable leaders of the group, Bobbitt having originally worked with the committee. Bobbitt and Charters wanted public schools to train children for their different roles in the working structure rather than squander the public's money by trying to educate students who were not likely to go to college or professions (Ravitch, 2000). Of the two, Bobbitt stands as the "quintessential example" (Cremin, 1961, p. 199).

#### John Franklin Bobbitt's Theory of Activity Analysis

Bobbitt (1924) understood that the social changes occurring in the early twentieth century necessitated a change in education so that it might perform functions it had not previously endeavored and terminate practices that were no longer useful. While many educators of his time felt that change was progress, Bobbitt (1924) warned that "merely shifting position is not progress" because the possibility of "going wrong" exceeded the chances of "going right" (p. 7). Unlike Dewey and Kilpatrick, whose theories espoused the school as an agent of social change, Bobbitt (1924) preferred maintaining the status quo over changes in the wrong direction. He concluded

that curriculum making needed guiding principles to lead it with all possible certainty in "right directions" (Bobbitt, 1924, p. 7).

Bobbitt's (1924) theory of curriculum began with a "simple assumption . . . that education is to prepare men and women for the activities of every kind which make up, or which ought to make up, well-rounded adult life; that it has no other purpose; that everything should be done with a view to this purpose; and that nothing should be included which does not serve this purpose" (pp. 7-8). Bobbitt (1924) believed that education purposed to prepare learners for adulthood rather than childhood and youth. According to Bobbitt, the curriculum that prepared the learner for the activities of adulthood would prepare the learner for life (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). He applied his theory to all levels of education, including "pre-primary, primary, elementary, junior high school, senior high school, and junior college," claiming that all schools "are training for the same adult life" and "aimed at the same ultimate goals" (Bobbitt, 1924, p. 30). His focus on preparation for adult life and his indifference about childhood and youth clearly demonstrated his lack of concern and focus on the learner, an aspect that distinctly separates his theory from Dewey's and Kilpatrick's, both of whom placed great emphasis on the interests and needs of the child.

Bobbitt (1924) asserted that learning what men and women "ought to do along the many lines and levels of human experience" would reveal "the things for which they should be trained" (p. 8). To develop educational objectives, which comprised the content of the various subjects, he needed to discover "the activities which ought to make up the lives of men and women," along with the "abilities and personal qualities necessary for proper performance" (Bobbitt, 1924, p. 8). In order to do so, he developed a plan called activity analysis. The method involved the analysis of the specific activities needed for the performance of a given job, the implication being that the schools could reduce the curriculum to twenty or thirty thousand mechanical skills or behaviors (Tanner & Tanner, 1990).

The first step in activity analysis involved analyzing a "broad range of human experience into major fields" (Bobbitt, 1924, p. 8). Bobbitt (1924) allowed for different curriculum-making groups to make divisions best fit for their own purposes, but he offered one that he described as "serviceable" (p. 8).

His division included the following:

1. Language activities; social intercommunication.
2. Health activities.
3. Citizenship activities.
4. General social activities—meeting and mingling with others.
5. Spare-time activities, amusements, recreations.
6. Keeping one's self mentally fit—analogous to the health activities of keeping one's self physically fit.

7. Religious activities.
8. Parental activities, the upbringing of children, the maintenance of a proper home life.
9. Unspecialized or non-vocational practical activities.
10. The labors of one's calling. (Bobbitt, 1924, pp. 8-9)

Bobbitt's (1924) second step involved breaking the major fields down into more specific activities, first dividing the field into "a rather few large units" and then breaking them up into smaller ones (p. 9). He directed that the division process should continue until the curriculum maker "has found the quite specific activities that are to be performed" (Bobbitt, 1924, p. 9).

Kliebard (1995) maintained that Bobbitt understood that no curriculum could include the entire range of human activity. The learner achieved some objectives without cognizant effort, and the curriculum maker needed to be aware of these objectives so that he could allow as much as possible to be learned indirectly. Additionally, schools did not have to teach everything, as children learned some things through the natural process of socialization. Consequently, Bobbitt suggested that schools focus attention on shortcomings, the deficits that people demonstrated after the full range of activities had been discovered. He explained that the theory of finding the academic curriculum in the shortcomings of children and adults was familiar to teachers in its application of objective performance

in such areas as spelling and grammar, but it was not as obvious regarding the "highly complex subjects of history, literature, geography, etc." (Bobbitt, 1918, p. 50). Therefore, Bobbitt (1918) asserted, the first task of the curriculum maker was the discovery of the "social deficiencies that result from a lack of historical, literary, and geographical experiences" (p. 51). Each deficiency found required directed training and suggested an objective. The essence of the objectives then determined the curriculum materials necessary for the subjects. Bobbitt (1924) admonished the curriculum maker, at all stages of the analyses, to focus on "the *actual activities of mankind*" (p. 9). He explained that once the curriculum maker discovered the activities, the educational objectives—the abilities to perform the activities—would become clear because of the similarity between the activities and the objectives.

In his conclusion to The Curriculum, an introductory textbook in curriculum theory, Bobbitt (1918) suggested that the first necessity in curriculum reform was for the educational profession to adopt a social perspective rather than an academic perspective. Additionally, he believed it was more important for the educators to reach a consensus regarding a method of curriculum discovery than to reach a consensus on the details regarding curriculum content. Finally, Bobbitt (1918) emphasized making thought rather than imitation the basis of curriculum

making and urged educators to maintain a vision in advance of their practice.

#### Werrett Wallace Charters' Theory of Functional and Difficulty Analysis

Like Bobbitt, Charters considered himself to be "bringing the light of science to a field that had been governed by drift, tradition and fruitless speculation" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 101). Charters differed from Bobbitt, however, in his ideas on the source for curriculum objectives (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). Bobbitt determined curriculum objectives by scientific analysis, whereas Charters (1924) explained that functional analysis was a method of investigation, not a philosophy of education. The philosopher determined the goal, and the analyst provided the technique for making the goal part of a curriculum.

According to Charters, curriculum construction should begin with a list of the key objectives of education, "such as citizenship, morality, social efficiency, and growth" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 167). He believed that to replace in the curriculum what was "useless and merely symbolic" with what was directly useful required an analysis of the activities that humans engaged in along with a verification of the ideals that controlled those activities (Kliebard, 1995, p. 102). Charters (1924) began his discussion of curriculum construction by

explaining job analysis, the determination of "what activities are carried on by individuals in the performance of tasks" (p. 214). The curriculum maker developed a list of ideals and a list of activities related to the job in which the learner planned to work, in the present or in the future (Ravitch, 2000). Using these lists, the curriculum maker prepared units of study, ranked in order based on the learners' interests, their level of difficulty, and their function.

Charters (1924) deemed job analysis "a deliberate and persistent attempt to apply the method of analysis to constellations of activities from the functional point of view" (p. 214). He recommended it as a method of curriculum construction, assuming that "the function of a curriculum is to provide material for efficient performance, conduct, and behavior" (Charters, 1924, p. 214). Because of its restricted connotations with reference to curriculum construction, Charters (1924) suggested that functional analysis might be a more appropriate name than job analysis.

Charters (1924) asserted that functional analysis worked better with simple operations such as "making an apron, cleaning a fish, or sawing a board" (p. 214). As the activities became more complex, however, the analysis became more difficult. Consequently, functional analysis required "a great deal of

time, effort, money, and intelligent technical skill" (Charters, 1924, p. 215).

Because of the difficulty involved in analyzing vocations requiring superior intelligence and skill, Charters (1924) suggested substituting difficulty analysis. In difficulty analysis, the follower of the vocation listed the duties with which he had difficulty performing rather than a list of all his duties. Charters (1924) asserted that the duties with which a person had difficulty were the basis of his attention and thought, while most duties were routine and slipped from his memory. Charters (1924) applied the same concept to curriculum, using language as an example. One experienced difficulty in listing all the facts of language and grammar, and simply listing them also proved useless because many of the facts presented no difficulties. However, an analysis of the errors of written and spoken English, along with the methods and reasons for the methods of correcting the errors, resulted in "a seemingly adequate language curriculum" (Charters, 1924, p. 216).

In his discussion of difficulty analysis, Charters (1971) explained what he considered to be some major differences between his and Bobbitt's understanding of "shortcomings." Charters (1971) asserted that the undirected experience to which Bobbitt referred was not undirected regarding the curriculum;

rather, it was undirected "only so far as the learner's attitude is concerned" (p. 81). Even though the child felt he was getting what he wanted without interference, the objectives prescribed his limits of experience. However, the limits were not prescribed on the basis of difficulty; they were determined so that the learner would be "brought under the domination of the ideals and activities with which he should be brought into contact" (Charters, 1971, p. 81). In other words, the student had not failed to achieve them; rather, he needed to become aware of them. Charters (1971) maintained also that in many new subjects being taught no introductory undirected experience existed, making everything a difficulty. Charters (1971) did acknowledge that error was significant in determining where in the curriculum schools should place emphasis. Nonetheless, he insisted that "errors prescribe emphasis; they do not provide content" (Charters, 1971, p. 82).

Charters (1924) recommended a trait analysis along with the functional analysis because "much depends on personality traits, such as accuracy, neatness, courtesy, and firmness" (p. 218). Charters (1924) contended that failure rarely resulted from lack of information or technical skill but from "weaknesses of personality" (p. 218). He stressed that "what has to be done is not so important as how it is done" (Charters, 1924, p. 218).

Personality traits and character set the standards of performance.

Following Charters' explanation of scientific curriculum making, he addressed the issue of the subject matter. Charters did not reject academic subjects (Ravitch, 2000, p. 167). Instead, he suggested the possibility of eliminating the "obviously useless" subjects by a limited reorganization (Charters, 1971, p. 151). Charters (1971) asserted, however, that a complete reorganization required an analysis of life activities. He redirected school subjects with regard to their relationships to activities that were useful in adult life (Ravitch, 2000). According to Charters (1971), an analysis of life activities determined which subjects were of the most importance and required the most attention. Activities within the subjects needed to provide "drill and instruction" to properly prepare students to use them in the "broader range of life activities" (Charters, 1971, p. 151).

Charters' discussion of subject matter clearly demonstrated the major difference between the child-centered aspect of Dewey's and Kilpatrick's theories and Bobbitt's and Charter's social efficiency theories of curriculum making. Charters (1971) negated the interests of the child, asserting that children's activities "are modifications of adult activities that are produced by differences in ability, interests, and character;

but the core of the activities is the same" (p. 153). Charters (1971) admitted that the traditional curriculum took "no account of the laws of learning or of interest"; consequently, "the champion of the child has arisen to demand that the form in which the material taught shall be determined by the needs, interests, and ability of children rather than of adults" (p. 152). Charters (1971) contradicted that requirement, suggesting that it seemed simple, but analysis revealed "a number of tangles" (p. 152). Charters (1971) used Meriam's theory that the curriculum should be based on activity typical of children as an example of one such "tangle," citing the "difficulty in determining what is 'normal activity' for children (p. 152).

Like Bobbitt's, Charters' scientific curriculum design supported the status quo because the activities people were engaging in served as the norm for what people ought to do (Kliebard, 1995). The perception of social progress involved performing more competently what one would do anyway, disregarding the potential for changes in society having an effect on the nature and range of those activities. Charters (1924) countered criticism that functional analysis gave no thought to the future by suggesting the impossibility of knowing the future duties and methods of performing them in the next generation. Consequently, the school taught the current duties and the best method of performing them. As preparation for the

future, Charters (1924) urged teaching the children critical thinking and problem solving skills so that when they met new situations, they could ascertain the best methods of dealing with the situations.

Charters (1924) used an acronym, AIPRTE, to explain the composition of the curriculum:

Each activity (*A*) is controlled by an ideal (*I*), whether that ideal be high or low. The method of performance of an activity is determined by the accuracy, neatness, openmindedness, and courtesy of the performer. It is also carried on with due regard to persons (*P*). . . . Furthermore, when this activity, controlled by its proper ideals, is to be performed in connection with persons, reasoning (*R*) is used to plan the proper method of carrying on the activity. In some cases the plan is the important element in the activity. In other routine and simple situations, reason is reduced to a minimum and may completely disappear. After the activity has been planned, it is carried out with a certain technique (*T*). . . . Finally in the performance of the act there is an emotional or affective element (*E*), which constitutes the atmosphere in which the activity is performed. This emotional quality colors the experience of the action, and is frequently the single element which makes for its success or failure in life. (pp. 219-220)

Charters (1924) suggested that the efficiency of any activity depended upon ideals, thinking, the personal elements that enter in, or the emotional reactions of the students and that any of these factors could "make or break the effectiveness of the situation" (p. 220).

According to Ravitch (2000), Bobbitt and Charters created the professional field of curriculum studies and determined social efficiency to be the measure of good curriculum practice. Educators attempted to justify their schools based on social efficiency as opposed to the intellectual or cultural development of its students. Bobbitt's and Charters' influence remained obvious throughout the twentieth century in the emphasis educators placed on goals and objectives in the curricula of American schools.

#### Summary

Progressive educators of the early twentieth century based their theories upon the premise that encouraged developing a curriculum based on the scientific method and problem solving, supporting the idea of education as development from within. However, different interpretations of that premise manifest themselves in an analysis of the various theories. Dewey's theory stood at the forefront of progressive education, and his philosophy formulated the basic tenets of progressivism. Dewey asserted that the needs and interests of the child in the classroom should be a priority for educators and that the child should participate in his or her course of study, albeit under the guidance of a teacher (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999). Dewey believed that school should mirror the life of society at large

(Cremin, 1961). He perceived the need of education to increase the breadth of social situations in which individuals recognized concerns, made choices regarding those concerns, and acted upon their choices. Ultimately, Dewey sought to achieve intellectual development through the curriculum because it gave the individual control over his or her surroundings, which offered the most promise for a better society (Kliebard, 1995).

Kilpatrick's project method shared similarities with Dewey's theory in its concern for children. For Kilpatrick, the project method was not a way of reorganizing the teaching of particular subjects; rather, it was a substitute for the subject (Kliebard, 1995). Kilpatrick asserted that the process of teaching activities rather than subjects should replace the subject-centered curriculum of secondary schools (Zilversmit, 1993). Because no necessary conflict existed between social demands and the child's interests, practicing well-chosen purposeful acts under the guidance of teachers, while being held accountable for their actions, would prepare students for "the worthy life of the coming day" (Kilpatrick, 1918, p. 323). Kilpatrick (1918) believed education should prepare students to meet the "demands for practical efficiency and of moral responsibility," thus presenting the "ideal of democratic citizenship" (p. 322).

Differing from Dewey and Kilpatrick, Bobbitt and Charters analyzed contemporary society as the standard of priority in the curriculum (Cremin, 1961). Bobbitt (1924) believed the purpose of education was to prepare learners for adulthood rather than childhood and youth. He asserted that learning what men and women "ought to do along the many lines and levels of human experience" would reveal "the things for which they should be trained" (Bobbitt, 1934, p. 8). To develop educational objectives, which comprised the content of the various subjects, he needed to discover "the activities which ought to make up the lives of men and women," along with the "abilities and personal qualities necessary for proper performance" (Bobbitt, 1924, p. 8). In order to do so, he developed a plan called activity analysis (Bobbitt, 1924). The method involved the analysis of the specific activities needed for the performance of a given job, the implication being that the schools could reduce the curriculum to twenty or thirty thousand mechanical skills or behaviors (Tanner & Tanner, 1991). Charters (1924) began his discussion of curriculum construction by explaining job analysis, the determination of "what activities are carried on by individuals in the performance of tasks" (p. 214). The curriculum maker developed a list of ideals and a list of activities related to the job in which the learner planned to work, in the present or in the future (Ravitch, 2000). Using

these lists, the curriculum maker prepared units of study, ranked in order based on the learners' interests, their level of difficulty, and their function.

Meriam's work at University Elementary School incorporates ideas similar to other progressive education theories of the early twentieth century—especially Dewey's and Kilpatrick's. A reconstruction of his work explores the implications his theory and practice have for an understanding of early twentieth century progressive education as well as for curriculum practice today.

CHAPTER 3  
PREVAILING INTERPRETATIONS OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY  
PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

In this chapter, specific educational historians' interpretations of early twentieth century progressive theories and education will be discussed. Junius Meriam's theory and practice at University Elementary School encompassed characteristics similar to the theories of progressive education upon which this chapter focuses; consequently, information provided here proves relevant to the later analysis Meriam's work. The organization of the chapter will be based on six educational historians' discussion of two central points: prevailing interpretations of progressive education in general and the extent to which the theories of Dewey, Kilpatrick, Bobbitt, and Charters are consistent with the prevailing interpretations of progressive education. The interpretations will include those of Cremin (1961), Tanner & Tanner (1990), Zilversmit (1993), Kliebard (1995), Semel & Sadovnik(1999), and Ravitch (2000).

## Prevailing Interpretations of Progressive Education

Cremin (1961), who is considered the foremost historian of progressive education, asserted that the movement began as an effort to use the school to improve the lives of individuals by applying the ideal of democracy to the urban-industrial civilization engendered during the latter half of the nineteenth century. He credited Jane Addams, the founder of Hull House, for providing the crux of progressive education when she remarked, "We have learned to say that the good must be extended to all of society before it can be held secure by any one person or any one class; but we have not yet learned to add to that statement, that unless all men and all classes contribute to a good, we cannot even be sure that it is worth having'" (Cremin, 1961, p. ix). Enabling "'all men and all classes'" to contribute, Cremin (1961) claimed, meant four things:

First, it meant broadening the program and function of the school to include direct concern for health, vocation, and the quality of family and community life.

Second, it meant applying in the classroom the pedagogical principles derived from new scientific research in psychology and the social sciences.

Third, it meant tailoring instruction more and more to the different kinds and classes of children who were being brought within the purview of the school.

Finally, Progressivism implied the radical faith that culture could be democratized without being vulgarized, the faith that everyone could share not only in the benefits of the new sciences but in the pursuit of the arts as well. (p. viii)

Progressive educators who developed theories of progressive education, however, did not all agree about the meaning of the movement. Consequently, a "remarkable diversity of pedagogical protest and innovation" transpired throughout the progressive movement, which, from its inception, was "pluralistic, often self-contradictory, and always closely related to broader currents of social and political progressivism" (Cremin, 1961, p. 22). Universities saw rise of the movement in philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences as part of the rebellion against formalism. In cities, municipal reform embraced the movement as one of its components. Farmers perceived the movement as the essence of a reasonable substitute for radical land reform. It was the "'social education'" urban settlement workers wanted, the "'schooling for country life'" rural publicists wanted, the vocational training businessmen's associations and labor unions wanted, and the new teaching techniques forward-thinking educators wanted (Cremin, 1961, p. 22). The progressive movement affected all levels of education, from kindergarten to the university and attracted the interest of a diversity of people, including parents, teachers, reformers, and politicians.

According to Tanner & Tanner (1990), the last two decades of the nineteenth century engendered progress in the scientific community's thought regarding human nature and the universe.

Progressive educators aimed to develop critical thinkers. They wanted students, upon entering society, to be able to create better lives for themselves by controlling their environment instead of allowing the environment to control them.

Tanner & Tanner (1990) agreed with Cremin's contention that progressive education meant different things to different people. They described the child-centered romanticists, who focused more on the needs of the child and less on the need for systematic curriculum development. Though many critics attribute the child-centered movement to Dewey, Dewey attacked the idea that freedom existed in allowing the student to pursue his own interests. Rather, Dewey asserted freedom existed in a teacher's direction of choices and control of experience.

Tanner & Tanner (1990) also described the reconstructionists, who wanted to use the school for direct social correction. According to Tanner & Tanner (1990), the prescriptions of the reconstructionists were "preformulated and directed by an enlightened elite" (p. 351). Additionally, despite their claim to be democratic, these prescriptions did not preclude indoctrination, and they produced uniformity, repression, segregation, and despotism.

Finally, Tanner & Tanner (1990) described the experimentalists, who followed Dewey's beliefs and believed the democratic principle of mutual responsibility—each member of

society contributed to the good of all. For individuals to be able to contribute to the good of all, the school had to help each student discover his abilities and develop them as much as possible in the time allotted. Additionally, the school had to do this for an ever-increasing diversity of students, giving credence to the democratic promise of the equal opportunity for everyone. Equal opportunity, however, did not mean the same curriculum for everyone; rather, it meant a flexible curriculum adjusted to the needs of individuals, a curriculum that also strengthened the "ties which unite all citizens of a democracy" (Tanner & Tanner, 1990, p. 114). This flexible curriculum included only subjects that had an immediate value for the current needs and growth of the student.

According to Tanner & Tanner (1990), progressive educators in America sought to solve social problems through "enlightened social action" and believed education played a significant role in equipping students to bring out social change (p. 108). Unfortunately, progressive ideas did not always work out when they were implemented, but the ideas themselves were not necessarily at fault. The problem usually resided in that lack of practical suggestions for implementing the ideas.

Zilversmit (1993) also agreed that while progressive educators shared a common set of beliefs, its leaders stressed different facets of their goals, and as the movement progressed,

different facets of the progressive plan were stressed. Despite the differences, Zilversmit (1993) contended the existence of central set of ideas and practices, ideas and principles that grew from the writings of Dewey.

Zilversmit (1993) explained that the philosophical foundation of the progressive movement depended on Dewey's belief that all facets of life were continually changing; consequently, all human goals were provisional. The ultimate task of education, then, was to prepare people for life and for change. However, childhood should not be considered only as preparation for adult life. Therefore, schools should use children's natural curiosity instead of subordinating it to a pre-selected, though arbitrary, curriculum and future goals. Dewey's commitment to the idea of continual change and his belief that individuals could contribute to the creation of a better society placed a major responsibility on the school. He maintained that the school had to be the means of societal reform.

Though Zilversmith (1993) based his interpretation of progressive education on Dewey's beliefs, he explained that Dewey's philosophy was part of a larger picture. The larger outlook included devotion to scientific methods and to the idea of a democratic society. Devotion to the scientific method meant basing pedagogy on science by finding the conditions that

allowed learning to occur naturally, ultimately discovering methods to utilize the natural activities of children so that learning was the consequence. A democratic community manifested a combined communicated experience, the kind of experience that could only occur through the destruction of obstacles such as race, ethnicity, and class. The progressive movement sought to utilize its conception of the scientific method to realize a democratic community.

While he did not categorize the varying ideas stressed by different progressive theories, as did Tanner & Tanner, Zilversmit (1993) provided much the same descriptions. He described the child-centered progressives as those who agreed that the school should recognize the interests of the child, which were not exclusively academic, but explained that they differed from Dewey "by standing the traditional curriculum on its head" (Zilversmit, 1993, p. 12). While attending to the nonintellectual interests of children, they neglected academics. Zilversmit (1993) also discussed progressive educators who adopted Dewey's wish for social reform through education, emphasizing the fact that some educators used the "language of progressive education" to justify procedures that were not in accord with Dewey's goals (p. 13). Consequently, a degree of anti-intellectualism appeared as that aspect of the progressive movement became part of educational belief.

Interestingly, while Zilversmit (1993) considered particular reforms to be a part of the overall Progressive movement, he did not consider them to be part of progressive education. In this group Zilversmit (1993) included reformers who called for a vocational component, reformers concerned with helping European immigrants assimilate, and reformers concerned with "applying principles of efficiency, centralization, and bureaucratic decision making, based on the example of modern business, to the schools" (p. 2). These reformers saw the traditional curriculum as inefficient, called for standardization and testing, and wanted to "rescue urban schools from hopelessly inefficient and corrupt ward politics" (Zilversmit, 1993, p. 2).

Zilversmit (1993) asserted that despite the disagreement among progressive educators, they shared a common set of beliefs. A progressive educator who developed a theory of progressive education based it on this set of beliefs. Consequently, it is possible to recognize a distinct progressive education movement and determine its influence on education.

In his Preface to the first edition of The Struggle for the American Curriculum, Kliebard (1995), stated that he was puzzled by the meaning of the "innumerable references" he had seen to progressive education (p. xv). He explained that the more he studied, the more he believed that the term was meaningless

because it included such an extensive range of different, even contradictory, ideas on education. Kliebard (1995) concluded that the term was "not only vacuous but mischievous" (p. xv). He determined that he could identify and define nothing that deserved a single name, concluding that there were several reform movements in education during the twentieth century, and each had its own agenda. Kliebard (1995) decided instead to demarcate the foremost ideological positions of the different reform groups, including explanations for how they both balanced and contradicted each other. Ultimately, he settled on four groups: humanists, who stood in opposition to the other three groups; developmentalists; social efficiency educators; and social meliorists.

The humanists were "the guardians of an ancient tradition tied to the power and reason and the finest elements of the Western cultural heritage" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 23). Their task was to preserve through reinterpretation the "revered traditions and values" in a rapidly changing society (Kliebard, 1995, p. 23). The developmentalists led the charge for a curriculum aligned with the natural development of the child, using scientific data to understand the different stages of child and adolescent development, as well as the nature of learning. From this information they could develop a curriculum in accord with children's interests, needs, and learning patterns. The social

efficiency educators also believed in using scientific data, but their ultimate goal was to create "a coolly efficient, smoothly running society" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 24). They believed a scientifically-based curriculum could be more functional in the roles children took as adults. Additionally, society was becoming highly technical and demanded more specialization of skills, which meant more differentiation in the curriculum. The social meliorists perceived the school as the primary force for social change and social justice. They believed individuals held the power to bring about change, but the school had the power to create the new social vision.

In Kliebard's (1995) Preface to the second edition of his book, he explained the addition of an afterword entitled "The Search for Meaning in Progressive Education: Curriculum Conflict in the Context of Status Politics." Kliebard (1995) stated that he was influenced by the work of Joseph Gusfield, who, in the epilogue of his book Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance, reflected on the substance of his book, "casting new light on the way a symbolic politics framework enriches his interpretations—not rejecting earlier interpretations but imbuing them with new insight" (p. x). Kliebard's (1995) afterword traced a series of interpretations of progressive education, a movement he originally claimed could not be defined, much less interpreted. However, Kliebard (1995)

did not include any of his own interpretations; he limited his discussion to interpretations offered by other historians.

Semel & Sadovnik (1999) put Dewey at the forefront of movement in progressive education. According to Semel & Sadovnik (1999), Dewey based his methodology on the idea that children were "active, organic beings, growing and changing," so they needed a course of study that reflected their stage of development (p. 6). Dewey supported freedom and responsibility for students—essential factors in democratic living. He also believed that, to help students assume their eventual roles in society and live democratically, the school should reflect a democratic community. Basically, Semel & Sadovnik (1999) maintained, Dewey respected democracy and believed education contributed to a perfect realization of democracy through continual reconstruction and reorganization of society.

Unfortunately, other progressive educators "misread, misunderstood, and misinterpreted" Dewey, leading to a variety of different theories of progressive education (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 9). According to Semel & Sadovnik (1999), three progressive forms emerged: child-centered pedagogy, social efficiency pedagogy, and social reconstructionist pedagogy. The child-centered pedagogy argued that schools should develop curricula according to the stages of child development, maintaining that traditional schools suppressed children's

natural tendencies. The child-centered progressives also suggested individualizing instruction and paying attention to the needs and interests of the children. The social efficiency pedagogy encouraged schools not only to provide meaningful experiences for children but also to prepare them for the occupations they would assume as adults. To do this, schools should educate students according to their interests and abilities. The social reconstructionist pedagogy stressed the development of "a more just, humane and egalitarian community" (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 10). According to Semel & Sadovnik (1999), many child-centered schools incorporated the community-centered facets of social reconstructionism in their efforts to meet their students' individual needs while they were integrating them into a democratic community.

Semel & Sadovnik (1999) concluded that progressive reformers had "a sweeping agenda" (p. 4). Like virtually all reformers past and present, progressive educators viewed the school as a method of attacking social problems. It was no surprise that they turned to the schools as a way of "preserving and promoting democracy, within the new social order" (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 4).

According to Ravitch (2000), Dewey's beliefs encompassed the primary themes of progressive education. Dewey maintained that advancing education meant applying the social sciences,

especially psychology, to education. The school had to represent real life, so the best way to correlate the Three-R subjects was to focus on children's natural interests. According to Ravitch (2000), Dewey advised that what was taught in school should be determined by children's ability to understand it as it applied in real life. The school was a mechanism of social change and progress, so the focus of education should be problems and processes instead of academic subjects.

Ravitch (2000) agreed with Semel & Sadovnik that while Dewey inspired the progressive education movement, progressive educators were not always loyal to his intentions. She maintained that the progressive movement included four ideas, all of which undermined the basic idea that children should study an academic curriculum. The first idea was the mental testing movement, which embraced the idea that education could become a science, the methods and purpose of education being determined and measured scientifically. The second idea, the child-centered movement, suggested the methods and purpose of education could be drawn from the nature and needs of the child. The third idea, the social efficiency movement, claimed that the methods and purpose of education could be determined by assessing society's needs and preparing children for their role in society. The fourth idea manifested itself in two versions; the first version held that the method and purpose of education

could be altered in ways that would bring about social reform by "freeing children's creative spirit" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60). The second version believed that the methods and purpose of education could be changed in ways to bring about social reform by "indoctrinating them for life in a planned society" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60).

According to Ravitch (2000), all of these "camps" began to disagree with each other because of the contradictions among their views (p. 60). However, Ravitch (2000) claimed, the one aspect upon which all camps agreed was their common enemy: the traditional academic curriculum.

#### Consistency of Specific Early Twentieth Century Progressive Theories with Prevailing Interpretations of Progressive Education

Cremin (1961) praised several aspects of Dewey's (1900) The School and Society, a tract resulting from a series of three lectures Dewey delivered in response to criticism of his Laboratory School. The ideas Dewey (1900) explained in The School and Society expressed concern for the individual, focusing on utilizing the child's natural interests and talents, as well as teaching him or her to be self-directed. While the individual was important, even more important was the improvement of society at large. These principles are consistent

with Cremin's (1961) characteristic of progressive education, the "broadening of the program and function of the school to include direct concern for health, vocation, and the quality of family and community life" (p. viii).

Another work that Cremin (1961) found laudable was Dewey's (1916) Democracy and Education. Cremin (1961) explained that the "ideas of the work are legion" and "lent new vigor to the drive for educational reform" (pp. 120-121). In this work, Dewey, having studied the history of philosophy, provided "illuminating critical discussions of Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Herbart, and Froebel" (Cremin, 1961, p. 120). Additionally, Dewey demonstrated an awareness of the existing developments in pedagogy, psychology, and sociology. Cremin's (1961) second characteristic of progressive education addressed the classroom application of "pedagogical principles derived from the new scientific research in psychology and the social science" (p. viii). Dewey's awareness of the existing developments in pedagogy, psychology, and sociology is consistent with this characteristic.

Cremin (1961) contended that the ideas in Democracy and Education were especially appropriate for society at the time, "a society in flux, a society of immigrant groups engaged in a dramatic reshuffling of customs and allegiances, a society whose intellectuals sense a loss of community and a driving need to

rebuild it" (p. 121). Dewey's (1916) conception of democracy was:

more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. (p. 101)

Dewey maintained that democracy triumphed as more points of shared common interest among the diverse groups that made up society grew and created less restricted interaction and adjustment (Cremin, 1961). Dewey's emphasis on the school's role in breaking down the barriers of class, race, and ethnicity to build a community with shared interest among diverse groups is consistent with Cremin's (1961) third characteristic of progressive education, "tailoring instruction more and more to the different kinds and classes of children who were being brought within the purview of the school" (p. viii).

Cremin's (1961) critique of Democracy and Education included a discussion of Dewey's belief that democracy demanded "a reconstitution of culture, and with it the curriculum," that viewed scientific and industrial studies as tools for making people more aware of the life around them (p. 124). Dewey wanted to introduce vocational subjects to build practical skills and

as the point of departure for "increasingly intellectualized ventures into the life and meaning of industrial society" (Cremin, 1961, p. 124). He argued that no studies were "intrinsically endowed with liberating or cultural powers per se," so all subjects had potential to be cultural in its "widest possible range of meanings" (Cremin, 1961, p. 125). Therefore, culture could encompass a wider range of studies than ever before, and those studies included the sciences and trade as long as they were taught with the goal of growth in mind. Cremin's (1961) final characteristic of progressive education was the belief that society could be democratized with being "vulgarized," that everyone could share in the benefits of the new sciences as well as the pursuit of arts (p. viii). Dewey's idea of the reconstituted curriculum, which encompassed a wider range of studies, is consistent with this characteristic.

Sharing Cremin's high opinion of Democracy and Education, Tanner & Tanner (1990) lauded it as "the most brilliant study of pedagogical principles and practices in a democracy that had ever been written" (p. 9). Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of progressive education included three strands, including the romanticists, the reconstructionists, and the experimentalists. According to Tanner & Tanner (1990), experimentalists were those who remained loyal to Dewey's ideas. The logical expectation is that Dewey's theory is consistent

only with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of experimentalist progressive education. Indeed, Dewey's belief in a free society that offered the chance for the individual's development, development that was grounded in the perspective of democratic social responsibility, and Dewey's primary tenets involving the necessity of the learner's interest are consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of experimentalist progressive education. Even though Dewey was concerned with the interests of the child, his curriculum was not so child-centered that it ignored the need for systematic curriculum development, as Tanner & Tanner (1990) contended the romanticist strand did. The social reconstructionists wanted to use the school to bring about social reformation, but because their prescriptions did not preclude uniformity, repression, segregation, and despotism, their conception of democracy differed from Dewey's.

Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of Dewey's philosophy differed drastically from both Cremin's and Tanner & Tanner's. Zilversmit (1993) praised Dewey in the Preface to Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960, claiming he "read and admired the works of John Dewey and recognized the philosophy that had animated my summer experiences" (p. xi). Zilversmit (1993) also credited Dewey's educational philosophy as the basis of progressive education. In the text of his book, however, Zilversmit (1993) hypothesized

that the reason for the ultimate failure of progressive education was that the ideal itself was flawed.

Zilversmit (1993) based his interpretation of progressive education on Dewey's philosophy. Ironically, however, Zilversmit's (1993) criticisms implied that Dewey's beliefs are not consistent with that interpretation of progressive education. For example, according to Zilversmit (1993), progressive education was committed to the idea that the school was responsible for teaching the individual to contribute to the creation of a better society. Zilversmit (1993) implied that the application of Dewey's beliefs, though, resulted in a hidden form of social control by manipulating children to do what an external authority demanded. Zilversmit (1993) even claimed that the teachers were manipulated, so Dewey's idea that teachers could lead an important social revolution was illogical. In this respect, Dewey's beliefs seem to be more consistent with the strand of progressive education that, according to Zilversmit (1993), wanted social reform and used the "language of progressive education" to justify procedures that were not in accord with Dewey's goals, subsequently resulting in a form of anti-intellectualism (p. 13). Zilversmit (1993) also included in his interpretation of progressive education the principle of using children's natural curiosity instead of subordinating it to an arbitrarily pre-selected curriculum and children's future

goals. Dewey's beliefs were not aligned with progressive educators who, according to Zilversmit (1993), agreed that the school should recognize the interests of the child to the extent of "standing the traditional curriculum on its head" (p. 12). However, Zilversmit (1993) claimed the teachers were not at all interested in the students' interests, and only feigned concern for the students' interests by starting with something in which the students expressed an interest and subsequently leading them to the academic subject matter. Additionally, he claimed that the work in a progressive classroom only seemed unstructured, while it was actually planned in advance, with the teacher disguising her guidance.

Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of Dewey's beliefs implied a lack of consistency with his interpretation of progressive education in general. However, Zilversmit (1993) was not criticizing Dewey's ideas as inconsistent with his interpretation of the basic tenets of progressive education, which, after all, was based on Dewey's philosophy. Rather, he was criticizing the basic principles of progressive education, which he considered "flawed" (Zilversmit, 1993, p. 175). Therefore, despite the criticism of Dewey's beliefs, they are consistent with Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of progressive education.

Kliebard (1995) claimed he could not define progressive education, choosing instead to delineate four ideological positions of reform that occurred in the early twentieth century. He included humanists, developmentalists, social efficiency educators, and social meliorists. The humanists' task was to preserve through reinterpretation the "revered traditions and values" in a rapidly changing society (Kliebard, 1995, p. 23). The developmentalists led the charge for a curriculum aligned with the natural development of the child, using scientific data to understand the different stages of child and adolescent development, as well as the nature of learning. The social efficiency educators also believed in using scientific data, but their ultimate goal was to create "a coolly efficient, smoothly running society" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 24). The social meliorists believed individuals held the power to bring about change, but the school had the power to create the new social vision. According to Kliebard's (1995) ideologies, Dewey's beliefs were consistent with those of the humanists, the developmentalists, and the social meliorists. While Dewey did not want to continue teaching the traditional subject matter as it had always been taught, the Three-R subjects maintained an important role in his curriculum. According to Kliebard (1995), this idea is consistent in part with the humanists' ideology. However, Dewey believed the school's direction of the curriculum

should be toward what the child valued in the present rather than preparation for the future, an idea consistent with the developmentalists. The development of the child's individuality would then work to enhance the social community, an idea consistent with the ideology of the social meliorists.

Like Zilversmit, Semel & Sadovnik (1999) put Dewey at the forefront of the movement in progressive education, interpreting his beliefs as the basic principles of progressive education. Accordingly, his beliefs are consistent with Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of progressive education in general. Semel & Sadovnik (1999), like other historians, conceded that progressive educators often misinterpreted Dewey's beliefs, resulting in different strands of progressive education, which they labeled child-centered, social efficiency, and social reconstructionist. Because each of these strands was based on Dewey's principles, however, Dewey's beliefs are consistent in some respect to each of them. Like Dewey, child-centered progressives argued that schools should develop curricula according to the stages of child development, individualize instruction, and pay attention to the needs and interests of the children. The social efficiency pedagogy encouraged schools to educate students according to their interests and abilities, which was consistent with one of Dewey's principles. The social reconstructionist pedagogy stressed the development of "a more

just, humane and egalitarian community," an idea Dewey also embraced (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 10).

Like Zilversmit and Semel & Sadovnik, Ravitch (2000) interpreted Dewey's beliefs to be the crucial principles of progressive education, thus making his beliefs consistent with her interpretation of progressive education in general. Dewey maintained that advancing education meant applying the social sciences, especially psychology, to education. The school had to represent real life, so the best way to correlate the Three-R subjects was to focus on children's natural interests. According to Ravitch (2000), Dewey advised that what was taught in school should be determined by children's ability to understand it as it applied in real life. The school was a mechanism of social change and progress, so the focus of education should be problems and processes instead of academic subjects.

Ravitch (2000) agreed with Semel & Sadovnik that while Dewey inspired the progressive education movement, progressive educators were not always loyal to his intentions. She maintained that the progressive movement branched from Dewey's beliefs into four movements, all of which undermined the basic idea that children should study an academic curriculum: the mental testing movement, the child-centered movement, the social efficiency movement, and the social reform movement. The mental testing movement embraced the idea that the methods and purpose

of education should be determined and measured scientifically. The child-centered movement suggested the methods and purpose of education could be drawn from the nature and needs of the child. The social efficiency movement claimed that the methods and purpose of education could be determined by assessing society's needs and preparing children for their role in society. The fourth idea manifested itself in two versions; the first version held that the method and purpose of education could bring about social reform by "freeing children's creative spirit"; the second version believed that the methods and purpose of education could bring about social reform by "indoctrinating them for life in a planned society" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60).

Dewey's beliefs are consistent to a very small degree with Ravitch's interpretation of the mental testing movement in his devotion to the scientific method to determine the conditions that allowed learning to occur naturally, ultimately discovering methods to utilize the natural activities of children so that learning was the consequence. Though Ravitch (2000) criticized Dewey for being too tolerant of other practitioners who "adored children but abhorred subject matter, and who loved random experiences and cared not at all for connecting children's experience to the cumulative experience of the human race," she granted Dewey's belief of the importance of subject matter, suggesting that Dewey's beliefs are consistent with her

interpretation of the child-centered movement only to a limited degree (p. 173). Dewey's beliefs are completely inconsistent with her interpretation of the social efficiency movement. However, Dewey's belief that education could result in social reform is consistent to some degree with Ravitch's interpretation of the social reform movement.

Bobbitt and Charters analyzed contemporary society as the standard of priority in the curriculum (Cremin, 1961). They wanted public schools to train children for their different roles in the working structure rather than squander the public's money by trying to educate students who were not likely to go to college or professions (Ravitch, 2000).

Bobbitt's (1924) suggested curriculum divisions imply consistency with Cremin's (1961) first characteristic of progressive education, "broadening the program and function of the school to include direct concern for health, vocation, and the quality of family and community life" (p. viii). In his suggested curriculum divisions, Bobbitt included social intercommunication; health activities; citizenship activities; general social activities—meeting and mingling with others; staying mentally fit—analogous to the health activities of staying physically fit; parental activities, the upbringing of children, the maintenance of a proper home life; and the labors of one's calling (Bobbitt, 1924). Charters offered no such

curriculum divisions, stipulating only that the curriculum maker developed a list of ideals and a list of activities related to the job in which the learner planned to work, in the present or in the future (Ravitch, 2000). Consequently, the only consistency between Charters' theory and Cremin's first characteristic of progressive education is Charters' concern for vocation. Cremin (1961) credited Bobbitt for identifying "the actual with the desirable. . . . an identification closely tied to the quest for a science of education" (p. 199). This praise implies consistency with Cremin's (1961) second characteristic, the application of educational principles derived from research. Like Bobbitt, Charters considered himself to be "bringing the light of science to a field that had been governed by drift, tradition, and fruitless speculation" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 101). Therefore, there is also consistency between Charters' theory and Cremin's (1961) second characteristic of progressive education. Bobbitt's and Charters' theories fall short of consistency with Cremin's (1961) third characteristic, a concern for the different kinds and classes of children attending school, in their lack of concern for the learner. Bobbitt's and Charters' theories are also inconsistent with Cremin's (1961) last characteristic of progressive education, the belief that everyone could share in the benefits of the new sciences and in the pursuit of the arts. Bobbitt (1924) disregarded the

importance of social progress with his preference to maintain the status quo over making changes in the wrong direction. Charters' perception of social progress meant performing more competently what one would do anyway, disregarding the potential for changes in society having an effect on the nature and range of those activities (Kliebard, 1995). Regardless of the differences regarding why they were unconcerned about social progress, both theories focused on rote skills intended to adapt the learner to existing social conditions.

Considering their total disregard for the learner, Bobbitt's and Charters' theories are definitely not consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the child-centered progressive movement. Nor are Bobbitt's and Charters' theories consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the reconstructionist strand of progressivism, since their theories supported the status quo. Tanner & Tanner (1990) explained that the quantitative approach Bobbitt and Charters used in curriculum making was often erroneously linked to the experimentalists because of Dewey's devotion to the scientific method. However, Dewey perceived their "reductionist efforts as scientism rather than scientific" (Tanner & Tanner, 1990, p. 348). Bobbitt's and Charters' theories of scientific curriculum making were not at all consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990)

interpretations of the various strands of progressive education in general.

Zilversmit (1993) did not discuss Bobbitt or Charters because he did not consider them to be part of the progressive education movement. He did, however, consider them to be part of the Progressive movement in general. Zilversmit (1993) included in this group reformers who called for a vocational component, reformers concerned with helping European immigrants assimilate, and reformers concerned with "applying principles of efficiency, centralization, and bureaucratic decision making, based on the example of modern business, to the schools (p. 2). Clearly, Bobbitt's and Charters' theories are consistent with the last group of reformers in Zilversmit's (1993) description.

Because they preserved the use of the traditional academic curriculum, Bobbitt's and Charters' theories are consistent with Kliebard's (1995) interpretation of the humanists' ideology, which guarded "an ancient tradition tied to the power and reason of the finest elements of the Western cultural heritage" (p. 23). Bobbitt's and Charters' theories are also consistent with Kliebard's (1995) interpretation of the social efficiency educators, who believed in using scientific data to create "a coolly efficient, smoothly running society" (p. 24). Bobbitt's and Charters' negation of the importance of the child's interests and their lack of concern for social progress are

clearly inconsistent with Kliebard's (1995) interpretations of the ideologies of the developmentalists, who found significance in the child's interests, needs, and learning patterns, and the social meliorists, who perceived the school as the primary force for social change.

Like Zilversmit, Semel & Sadovnik (1999) did not discuss the theories of Bobbitt or Charters. Their theories, however, are not at all consistent with Dewey's beliefs, which provided the foundation for Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of progressive education. However, Semel & Sadovnik (1999) included interpretations of the branches of progressive education that resulted from the misinterpretations of Dewey's beliefs, which included the child-centered pedagogy, the social efficiency pedagogy, and the social reconstructionist pedagogy. Of these three strands, Bobbitt's and Charters' theories are consistent only with Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of the social efficiency pedagogy, which encouraged schools to prepare children for occupations they would assume as adults.

Ravitch (2000) interpreted Dewey's beliefs to be the basis for progressive education in general. However, she interpreted that four branches of progressive education resulted from other educators' misinterpretations of Dewey's ideas: the mental testing movement, the child-centered movement, the social efficiency movement, and the social reform movement. With regard

to Ravitch's (2000) interpretations of progressive education—both Dewey's beliefs and the offshoots—Bobbitt's and Charter's theories are consistent only with the social efficiency movement, which claimed the methods and purpose of education could be determined by assessing society's needs and preparing children for their role in society.

Kilpatrick's project method is somewhat consistent with Cremin's (1961) first characteristic of progressive education. Kilpatrick (1918) believed education should prepare students to meet the "demands for practical efficiency and of moral responsibility," thus representing the "ideal of democratic citizenship" (p. 322). He also asserted that children should be held accountable for their actions, thus preparing them for "the worthy life of the coming day" (Kilpatrick, 1918, p. 323). These aspects espoused the progressive concern for vocation and the overall quality of life (Cremin, 1961). Kilpatrick's project method is also consistent with Cremin's (1961) second characteristic of progressive education in its endeavor to join the educational psychology of the day by deriving pedagogy from educational research (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). Kilpatrick's interest in children's needs is consistent with Cremin's (1961) third characteristic of progressive education, which urged tailoring instruction to the different needs of children. Kilpatrick's project method falls short of consistency with

Cremin's (1961) fourth characteristic, the belief that everyone could share in the benefits of the new sciences and the pursuit of the arts. Kilpatrick asserted that schools could not predetermine subject matter; he saw it instead as a reconstruction of the child's experience (Kliebard, 1995). Under these circumstances, subject matter was not to be learned but was to function directly in realizing human purposes.

Because Tanner & Tanner (1990) suggested that it was not a curriculum theory at all, one could argue that the project method is not consistent with any of their interpretations of progressive education. The question of whether it is a theory or a method aside, Kilpatrick's project method is most consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the child-centered romanticists, who focused more on the needs of the child and less on the need for systematic curriculum development. Dewey himself attacked the idea that freedom existed in allowing students to pursue their own interests, asserting instead that freedom existed in a teacher's direction of choices and control of experience (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). While Kilpatrick (1918) was also concerned with preparing children to participate in the "ideal of democratic citizenship," his focus was not on teaching children to solve social problems (p. 322). Therefore, Kilpatrick's project method is not consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation

of the reconstructionists, who used the school for direct social correction. Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the experimentalist was based on Dewey's philosophy of education, and Kilpatrick's project method falls short of this interpretation in his disregard for traditional subject matter as well as his lack of concern for social reform.

Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of progressive education, like Tanner & Tanner's, was based on Dewey's beliefs, and the differences between Dewey's beliefs and the project method indicate little consistency between the two. Unlike Dewey's beliefs, the project method failed to address social reform, which also made it inconsistent with Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of the branch of progressive education that focused primarily on social reform. Additionally, it denigrated the importance of traditional subject matter (Zilversmit, 1993). While Dewey believed that teachers' understanding of children was necessary, he believed that a deep understanding of subject matter was more important. Kilpatrick, however, placed the teachers' love for children above the understanding of subject matter. Therefore, the project method is consistent with Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of the child-centered progressives, who agreed that the school should recognize the interests of the child, which were not exclusively academic, consequently neglecting traditional subject matter.

Of Kliebard's (1995) interpretations of the various ideologies, Kilpatrick's project method is consistent with the developmentalists, who asserted that the curriculum should be aligned with children's needs, interests, and learning patterns. The project method is not at all consistent with Kliebard's (1995) interpretation of the humanists, who wanted to preserve the traditional academic curriculum, or with the social efficiency educators who wanted education to contribute to a more efficiently-run society. Neither is there consistency between Kliebard's (1995) interpretation of the social meliorists, who perceived the school as the source of social change, and Kilpatrick's project method, which showed no concern for engendering social reform.

Semel & Sadovnik (1999) did not discuss Kilpatrick's project method, but one can still interpret his work in relation to their perspectives of progressive education. Like Tanner & Tanner and Zilversmit, Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of progressive education was based on Dewey's philosophy. Consequently, Kilpatrick's exclusion of traditional subject matter and concern for social reform make the project method inconsistent with Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of progressive education in general. The project method is also not consistent with Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of the social efficiency pedagogy, which encouraged schools to prepare

children for occupations they would assume as adults, or the social reconstructionist pedagogy, which stressed the development of a more civilized and classless society. However, Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of the child-centered pedagogy, which they considered one of the branches of progressive education, is consistent with the project method's concern for the interests and needs and of the child.

Like many other educational historians, Ravitch (2000) based her interpretation of progressive education on Dewey's beliefs but also included interpretations of the movements she considered offshoots of Dewey's. Kilpatrick's project method is not consistent with Ravitch's (2000) interpretation of Dewey's beliefs, again, for its failure to address the idea of social reform and for its denigration of traditional subject matter. Though Kilpatrick's project method promoted the idea of worthy living, it did not focus on preparing children for a specific role in their adult lives. Therefore, it is not consistent with Ravitch's (2000) interpretations of the social efficiency movement, which advocated assessing society's needs and preparing children for their role in society. The project method's lack of concern for bringing about social change makes it inconsistent also with the social reform movement, which sought to bring about social reform by tapping into children's creative spirits or by indoctrinating children into a planned

society. Kilpatrick's project method attempted to join behaviorism and Dewey's method of intelligence, and behaviorism equated to the establishment of the proper responses (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). Therefore, Kilpatrick's project method was somewhat consistent with Ravitch's (2000) interpretation of the mental testing movement, which embraced the idea that education could become a science. Considering Kilpatrick's belief that the child could create his or her own curriculum indicates that project method is also consistent with Ravitch's (2000) interpretation of the child-centered movement, which suggested teaching children by drawing from their nature and needs.

#### Summary

Examination of the prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education reveals consensus as well as disagreement. Cremin (1961) asserted that progressive education meant four things: broadening the program and purpose of the school to include concern for health, vocation, and the quality of family and community life; applying in the classroom the pedagogical principles derived from new scientific research in psychology and the social sciences; tailoring instruction to the different kinds and classes of children who were attending school, and believing that everyone could share not only in the benefits of the new sciences but in the pursuit of the arts as

well. Progressive educators who developed theories of progressive education, however, did not all agree about the meaning of the movement, which gave rise to a number of different progressive theories.

Tanner & Tanner (1990) agreed with Cremin's contention that progressive education meant different things to different people. They described the child-centered romanticists, who focused more on the needs of the child and less on the need for systematic curriculum development. Tanner & Tanner (1990) also described the reconstructionists, who wanted to use the school for direct social correction. Finally, Tanner & Tanner (1990) described the experimentalists who followed Dewey's beliefs and believed the democratic principle of mutual responsibility.

Zilversmit (1993) contended the existence of a central set of ideas and practices, which grew from the writings of Dewey. While he did not categorize the varying ideas stressed by different progressive theories, as did Tanner & Tanner, Zilversmit (1993) provided much the same descriptions. He described the child-centered progressives as those who agreed that the school should recognize the interests of the child, but that often resulted in the neglect of academics. Zilversmit (1993) also discussed progressive educators who adopted Dewey's wish for social reform through education, emphasizing the fact that some educators used the "language of progressive education"

to justify procedures that were not in accord with Dewey's goals, leading to the appearance of anti-intellectualism (p. 13). Interestingly, while Zilversmit (1993) considered particular reforms to be a part of the overall Progressive movement, he did not consider them to be part of progressive education. In this group Zilversmit (1993) included reformers who called for a vocational component, reformers concerned with helping European immigrants assimilate, and reformers concerned with "applying principles of efficiency, centralization, and bureaucratic decision making, based on the example of modern business, to the schools" (p. 2).

In his Preface to the first edition of The Struggle for the American Curriculum, Kliebard (1995) determined that he could identify and define nothing that deserved the single name progressive education, concluding that there were several reform movements in education during the twentieth century, and each had its own agenda. Kliebard (1995) decided instead to demarcate the foremost ideological positions of the different reform groups and explain how they both balanced and contradicted each other. Ultimately, he settled on four groups: humanists, who stood in opposition to the other three groups; developmentalists; social efficiency educators; and social meliorists. The humanists were "the guardians of an ancient tradition tied to the power and reason and the finest elements

of the Western cultural heritage" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 23). The developmentalists led the charge for a curriculum aligned with the natural development of the child, using scientific data to understand the different stages of child and adolescent development, as well as the nature of learning. The social efficiency educators also believed in using scientific data, and they believed a scientifically-based curriculum could be more functional in the roles children took as adults. The social meliorists perceived the school as the primary force for social change and social justice.

Semel & Sadovnik (1999) put Dewey at the forefront of movement in progressive education. Unfortunately, other progressive educators misinterpreted Dewey, leading to a variety of different theories of progressive education. According to Semel & Sadovnik (1999), three progressive forms emerged: child-centered pedagogy, social efficiency pedagogy, and social reconstructionist pedagogy. The child-centered pedagogy argued that schools should develop curricula according to the stages of child development and suggested individualizing instruction and paying attention to the needs and interests of the children. The social efficiency pedagogy encouraged schools not only to provide meaningful experiences for children but also to prepare them for the occupations they would assume as adults. The social reconstructionist pedagogy stressed the development of "a more

just, humane and egalitarian community" (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 10).

According to Ravitch (2000), Dewey's beliefs encompassed the primary themes of progressive education. However, Ravitch (2000) agreed with Semel & Sadovnik that while Dewey inspired the progressive education movement, progressive educators were not always loyal to his intentions. She maintained that the progressive movement included four ideas, all of which undermined the basic idea that children should study an academic curriculum. The first idea was the mental testing movement, which embraced the idea that education could become a science, the methods and purpose of education being determined and measured scientifically. The second idea, the child-centered movement, suggested the nature and needs of the child could determine the methods and purpose of education. The third idea, the social efficiency movement, claimed that assessing society's needs and preparing children for their role in society could determine the methods and purpose of education. The fourth idea manifested itself in two versions; the first version held that the method and purpose of education could be altered in ways that would bring about social reform by "freeing children's creative spirit" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60). The second version believed that the methods and purpose of education could be

changed in ways to bring about social reform by "indoctrinating them for life in a planned society" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60).

Dewey's theory is the most consistent with the Cremin's (1961), Tanner & Tanner's (1990), Zilversmit's (1993), Semel & Sadovnik's (1999), and Ravitch's (2000) interpretations of progressive education in general. With the exception of Cremin (1961), these historians' interpretations of progressive education were based specifically on Dewey's theory. Kliebard (1995) contended progressive education could not be defined, instead delineating ideologies for four reform movements, including the developmentalists. Dewey's theory is consistent with Kliebard's interpretation of the developmentalists, which read much like the other historians' interpretation of the progressive movement in general.

Bobbitt's and Charter's theories are somewhat consistent with Cremin's (1961) first two characteristics of progressive education, broadening the program and function of the school to include concern for health, vocation, and the quality of life, and the application of educational principles derived from research. Tanner & Tanner (1990) explained that the quantitative approach Bobbitt and Charters used in curriculum making was often erroneously linked to the experimentalists because of Dewey's devotion to the scientific method. However, Dewey perceived their "reductionist efforts as scientism rather than

scientific" (Tanner & Tanner, 1990, p. 348). Bobbitt's and Charters' theories of scientific curriculum making were not at all consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretations of any of the various strands of progressive education. Because they preserved the use of the traditional academic curriculum, Bobbitt's and Charters' theories are consistent with Kliebard's (1995) interpretation of the humanists' ideology, which guarded "an ancient tradition tied to the power and reason of the finest elements of the Western cultural heritage" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 23). Bobbitt's and Charters' theories are also consistent with Kliebard's (1995) interpretation of the social efficiency educators, who believed in using scientific data to create "a coolly efficient, smoothly running society" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 24). While Zilversmit (1993) considered Bobbitt and Charters to be part of the Progressive movement in general, he did not consider them to be a part of progressive education.

Zilversmit (1993) included in this group reformers who called for a vocational component, reformers concerned with helping European immigrants assimilate, and reformers concerned with "applying principles of efficiency, centralization, and bureaucratic decision making, based on the example of modern business, to the schools (p. 2). Clearly, Bobbitt's and Charters' theories are consistent with the last group of reformers in Zilversmit's (1993) description. Bobbitt's and

Charters' theories are consistent with Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of the social efficiency pedagogy, which encouraged schools to prepare children for occupations they would assume as adults. With regard to Ravitch's (2000) interpretations of progressive education—Dewey's beliefs and the offshoots—Bobbitt's and Charter's theories are consistent only with the social efficiency movement, which claimed the methods and purpose of education could be determined by assessing society's needs and preparing children for their role in society.

Kilpatrick's project method is somewhat consistent with Cremin's (1961) first characteristic of progressive education in its concern for vocation and the overall quality of life. Kilpatrick's project method is also consistent with Cremin's (1961) second characteristic of progressive education in its endeavor to join the educational psychology of the day by deriving pedagogy from educational research (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). Kilpatrick's interest in children's needs is also consistent with Cremin's (1961) third characteristic of progressive education, which urged tailoring instruction to the different needs of children. Kilpatrick's project method is most consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the child-centered romanticists, who focused more on the needs of the child and less on the need for systematic curriculum

development. Of Kliebard's (1995) interpretations of the various ideologies, Kilpatrick's project method is consistent with the developmentalists, who asserted that the curriculum should be aligned with children's needs, interests, and learning patterns. Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of the child-centered pedagogy, which they considered one of the branches of progressive education, is consistent with the project method's concern for the interests and needs and of the child.

Kilpatrick's project method attempted to join behaviorism and Dewey's method of intelligence, and behaviorism equated to the establishment of the proper responses (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). Therefore, Kilpatrick's project method was somewhat consistent with Ravitch's (2000) interpretation of the mental testing movement, which embraced the idea that education could become a science. Considering Kilpatrick's belief that the child could create his or her own curriculum indicates that project method is also consistent with Ravitch's (2000) interpretation of the child-centered movement, which suggested teaching children by drawing from their nature and needs.

The differing interpretations of early twentieth century theories and progressive education mirrored the same lack of agreement that progressive educators demonstrated through their development of their varied theories. Even though progressive educators of the early twentieth century espoused the same basic

principles, varied interpretations of those basic principles grew into many different theories. While Dewey's theory can be interpreted as the definitive curriculum theory of progressive education, educational historians cannot contend that because an educator was a part of the progressive educational movement, he espoused the same ideas that Dewey espoused, as examination and comparison of the theories of Dewey, Bobbitt, Charters, and Kilpatrick clearly demonstrates. Only in-depth study of the theory and practice of any progressive educator can expose the inaccuracies of any educational historian's interpretations. Studies such as the reconstruction of Meriam's work at University Elementary School reveal significant aspects of earlier theories and practices, potentially impacting the prevailing interpretations of those theories and practices as well as current curriculum practice.

## CHAPTER 4

## MERIAM'S THEORY OF INSTRUCTION AND CURRICULUM

In this chapter, Meriam's major works will be discussed, explicating his theory of education and the principles upon which he based his work. Meriam's career as an educator began in 1895 as high school principal and township superintendent of schools in Wakeman, Ohio. He worked there until 1898, when he became the principal of Spicer Elementary School in Akron, Ohio. He remained in Akron for only a year before moving to New York to be critic teacher at the New York State Normal College until 1901. From 1902-1903 he was assistant in philosophy and education at Harvard University; he then served as assistant in education at Columbia University from 1903-1904, where he was pursuing his Ph.D., which he completed in 1905. In 1904, he became professor of education at the University of Missouri, a position he held for the next twenty years; from 1905-1924, he also served as superintendent of University Schools for the University of Missouri. In addition to his work during his tenure at the University of Missouri, Meriam served as director of the Francis W. Parker School in San Diego, California from 1921-22, and director of the Glendora (California) Foothills

School in 1924 (The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, 1965).

Meriam left the University of Missouri in 1924 to become professor of education at the University of California at Los Angeles, where he worked until he retired as professor emeritus in 1943. In 1931, while Meriam was working at the University of California, he also served as visiting professor of education at Columbia University and visiting lecturer in education at New York University (NCAB, 1965).

Throughout his career, Meriam spent his summers lecturing in education at various institutions. These institutions included Cornell University (1908), the University of Pittsburgh (1915), Columbia University (1916), the University of Wisconsin (1920), the University of Detroit (1921), the University of Omaha (1921), Washington State College, Pullman (1922), the University of California, Berkeley (1930 and 1935), and the New York State College for Teachers, Albany (1931) (NCAB, 1965).

While Meriam (1906) held the position of superintendent of University Schools for the University of Missouri, he published his first major work, Normal School Education and Efficiency in Teaching. He also contributed numerous articles to the field of education and delivered speeches at annual meetings of the National Education Association. Most of his work clearly derived from the theories he put into practice at Missouri's

experimental elementary school, theories he later explicated more fully in Child Life and the Curriculum (1920).

Research of the Relationship between Teacher Training and  
Success in Teaching

Meriam's (1906) first major work, Normal School Education and Efficiency in Teaching, differed from most of his later work. The book collected five studies related to the work of Normal Schools as training institutions and the efficiency of elementary school teachers. The problem in all of the studies was the relationship between the ability to teach and aptitude in previous study and training. The first study, historical in nature, examined the beginning and rise of the study of psychology, the nature of which Meriam (1906) described as general and outdated. The second study used a questionnaire, completed by Normal School graduates who were teaching, to determine the effectiveness of the study of psychology. While the subjectivity of a questionnaire made any conclusions provisional, the evidence suggested that the study of psychology was "vague, loose, and in need of reconstruction" (Meriam, 1906, p. 10).

The third study Meriam (1906) discussed, statistical in nature, investigated the relationship between teaching efficiency and scholarship. The study revealed that success in

practice teaching and in the study of psychology were the major contributors of success in teaching. Additionally, the study concluded that the emphasis on "'Methods'" was unnecessary and that subject-matter courses only ranked slightly more important than "'Methods'" (Meriam, 1906, pp. 10-11). Finally, the study revealed deficiency in methods of grading scholarship.

The fourth study Meriam (1906) explicated considered the general preparation of elementary teachers. The study revealed that more or less than a high school diploma made no difference, college graduates were less successful in the lower grades, and work in Normal Schools did not contribute "as much as one might expect," though graduates of Normal Schools were more successful than teachers trained in city training schools (Meriam, 1906, p. 11). However, teachers trained in city training schools fared better than those with no training in pedagogy. The fifth and final study in Meriam's (1906) collection investigated the qualifications of teachers in State Normal Schools of New York. The study revealed that one fourth of them were college graduates, and one third had never studied beyond the Normal Schools in which they were teaching.

#### Introduction of Meriam's Theory of Education

Meriam (1909) moved away from the topic of teacher education and efficiency in teaching and closer to the ideas to

which he devoted his career in one of his early articles, "Fundamentals in the Elementary School Curriculum." This article introduced the idea that dominated his work at University Elementary School—the idea that school officials, teachers, and parents needed a greater appreciation of the nature of children in their normal activities outside of school. In the article, Meriam (1909) focused on "waste in school work," which he deemed "due to a maladjustment between means and end" (p. 390). He perceived the maladjustment to be between the curriculum's content and the pupils' needs and the community's needs. To explain this maladjustment, Meriam (1909) differentiated between the adult view and the child view regarding the function of the curriculum.

Meriam (1909) asserted that in the adult view, the curriculum was selected and organized with social efficiency as the ultimate aim of education. Because life in the twentieth century was so complex, "a score of school subjects are used" (Meriam, 1909, p. 391). Consequently, the subjects were isolated and unrelated, congested, and abstract. According to Meriam (1909), the efforts made to solve those problems—enrichment, omission, and correlation—caused even more problems.

Meriam (1909) contended that the perspective of the child differed greatly from that of the adult. Meriam (1909) believed the "schoolboy" was "too limited in experience to plan for the

future" (p. 393). Rather he lived in the present, caring for school subjects only to the extent that they contributed to his current needs. Meriam (1909) contended that adults were "slowly coming to this view," realizing that "the most adequate adjustment today prepares best for adequate adjustment tomorrow" (p. 393). In such a curriculum, school subjects were introduced into the course of study when the student needed them for extension of prior knowledge.

Meriam (1909) provided a four-part principle to guide the selection and organization of the curriculum's content. Though he changed the wording, Meriam (1920) later incorporated the same ideas into his five principles of making curricula, which he published in Child Life and the Curriculum. First, the content needed to have "a place in the curriculum which meets real, present needs of the pupil" (Meriam, 1909, p. 394). Meriam (1909) believed that schools were not "adequately serving individual and community needs" and suggested that "the curriculum be more practical and constructive, relating more specifically to every-day life" (p. 394). Second, Meriam (1909) required the curriculum content to contribute to the student's need, thus supplying a "conscious motive" (p. 394). Third, Meriam (1909) required student comprehension and understanding regarding the significance of the content. Finally, Meriam (1909) required that the content contribute "to the continuity

in the development of the special problem being studied" (p. 393-394).

Meriam (1909) concluded his article with a suggested curriculum, which, not coincidentally, was the curriculum he had implemented at University Elementary School. Meriam's (1909) description of his curriculum laid the foundation for the work he later explicated in Child Life and the Curriculum (1920). Meriam's (1909) curriculum began with the question, "What are the normal activities of children of school age, in which the school can assist?" (p. 395). Those activities, according to Meriam (1909), were play, observation, and hand-work. Meriam (1920) later added stories to the activities, which he explained in The Child Life and the Curriculum, the book that thoroughly explicated his work at University Elementary School. Meriam (1909) suggested that, initially, these activities centered "largely in the self"; as the child grew older, however, he became interested in the "activities of those about him and later interested in industrial activities of the world at large" (p. 395). Meriam (1909) asserted that the function of the curriculum was to help students "in their own activities and in understanding the activities of others" (pp. 395-396).

### Criticism of the Traditional School

Like "Fundamentals in the Elementary School Curriculum," most of Meriam's articles were critical of the traditional school, but not all of them focused primarily on curriculum theory. For example, in "Recitation and Study," Meriam (1910) discussed his objections to traditional homework assignments in which students were expected to teach themselves. Meriam (1910) suggested instead that class study should prepare students "to face the problem, to see the method of attack; then leave to the pupil the completion of the study at home" (p. 631).

In "Measuring School Work in Terms of Life out of School," Meriam (1917a) continued his condemnation of the traditional curriculum. Rather than discussing the curriculum *per se*, however, he discussed how students were measured in their abilities in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Meriam (1917a) explained that social and industrial changes were making "great demands on schools," but educators tested without reference to the changes (p. 342). Meriam (1917a) contended that "ability tested in a formal exercise leaves still the problem of the correlation between formal exercise and normal experience" (p. 341). Consequently, "measurements of abilities should be in terms of normal experiences rather than in terms of abstractions from that experience" (Meriam, 1917a, p. 341). Meriam (1917a) even suggested that commercial and industrial men could assist

in making the measurements. The result, Meriam (1917a) asserted, would be "a demand for a more valuable educational content in the school curriculum; a curriculum in terms of life out of school" (p. 341).

#### Educational Experimentation

In "The Control of Educational Progress through Educational Experimentation," Meriam (1917b) again addressed the issue of testing but approached it through the perspective of laboratory experimentation versus school experimentation. While Meriam (1917b) acknowledged the value of laboratory experimentation in supplying knowledge rather than speculation, he referenced the danger that experimentation could be conducted for the purposes of science rather than the "social betterment of boys and girls" (p. 602). Meriam (1917b) urged that experimentation instead be "directed to larger social problems and conducted under normal school conditions" (p. 604). Meriam (1917b) cited some successful experimental schools as examples, including Dr. Kerschensteiner's continuation schools of Munich, which supplemented apprenticeships by instruction in trade and citizenship. He also referenced Dewey's school at the University of Chicago, Superintendent Wirt and the Gary schools, Madame Montessori, and his own work at University Elementary School. Meriam (1917b) contended that the problems studied in

educational experimentation should be "large educational issues rather than limited schoolroom methods" (p. 606). He asserted that the real issue was improving the "out-of-school lives of our young people" and that "problems of organization, methods, equipment and the like are strictly subordinate" (Meriam, 1917b, p. 606).

#### Explication of Meriam's Theory and Practice

While at the University of California, Meriam produced two more major works. For the first, Catalog of Units of Work, Activities, Projects, etc., to 1932, Meriam (1932) collaborated with two other educators. For the second, Activities, Projects, Units of work, Cataloged for 1932-1939, which continued the work of the first, Meriam (1943a) worked alone. Meriam also continued to contribute articles to the field of education and to make speeches at the annual meetings of the National Education Association. Many of Meriam's articles and speeches maintained the focus of his work at the University of Missouri. For example, in his 1927 speech to the National Education Association, Meriam again addressed the idea that the education of children relies on an "intimate knowledge of the normal activities of children" (p. 468). Meriam (1927) contended that "child life is one of doing, primarily; and learning, only secondarily" (p. 468). Meriam (1927) also asserted that "child

life is one of play, coordinate with any work that is to be done" (p. 469). These ideas, Meriam (1927) concluded, implied that the curriculum should consist primarily of children's activities "leading, in later grades and the high school, to a study of the specific activities of people" and that the curriculum should include "a good balance of wholesome play and vigorous work, commensurate with real life" (p. 469).

A year later, Meriam (1928) published "Educational Research and Statistics: Children's Activities and the School Curriculum." In this article, Meriam (1928) explicated further the ideas he discussed only briefly in his speech at the 1927 meeting of the National Education Association. Meriam (1928) began the article with an anecdote about a baby who chose to play with a "brightly polished cuspidor" because his mother had provided nothing else (p. 458). The mother, quite disgusted, "snatched the child away and kicked the coveted 'toy' under a chair" (Meriam, 1928, p. 458). Meriam (1928) used this incident to introduce his first thesis: "Parents and teachers fail to provide children and pupils with occupations called for by their natures and their needs: fail—not by reason of indifference, but because of a lack of understanding and appreciation of child life" (p. 458). Meriam's (1928) second thesis introduced the data from child studies he explicated later in the article: "Parents and teachers should generously provide little people

with the opportunity to be far more active in doing—in contrast with the emphasis usually given to learning” (p. 458). The mistakes parents and teachers made, Meriam (1928) explained, resulted from their failure to realize that “childhood is a period to be actively lived through by all children who develop normally. That is, in home and community, childhood is to too great an extent a period of retention while waiting for youth and adulthood” (p. 458). Meriam (1928) then presented data from the study that proved “play activities and doing activities . . . suggest . . . a shift in emphasis from work to play and from learning to doing” (p. 459). Meriam (1928) concluded his article with the same implications with which he concluded his speech at the 1927 meeting of the National Education Association: “Child life is one of doing, primarily, and learning only secondarily” and “Child life is one of play—to a very large extent” (p. 462).

In “An Educational Yearbook and Propaganda,” Meriam (1931) returned to his criticism of the traditional school and those who supported it. Meriam (1931) asserted that the Twenty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, which included two reports of the society’s Committee on Arithmetic entitled “Some Aspects of Modern Thought on Arithmetic” and “Research in Arithmetic,” was “a large volume of questionable contribution to this reputation of this society” (p. 697). Meriam (1931) wrote the review “as an active member of

the society" who found the yearbook, in its treatment of mathematics, to be "narrow and biased" and believed that "undue consideration and space have been accorded those who offered contributions strictly in harmony with the prevailing views of the chairman, but to those who had other views no consideration was given" (p. 697). F.B. Knight chaired the committee, the members of which included W.A. Brownell, B.R. Buckingham, G.T. Buswell, C.E. Greene, and R.L. West (National Society for the Study of Education, 1930). Though he did not provide the names of the contributors, Meriam (1931) offered as support two projects rejected from the yearbook, both of which supported the theory that "less time and attention to formal mathematics would not lead to less efficiency in arithmetical ability" (p. 700). Meriam (1931) contended that the extended analysis of mathematics advocated by the yearbook was in support of the traditional emphasis on formal arithmetic. Meriam (1931) concluded his derisive review by suggesting the yearbook impressed its reader with repetition, perspectives, methods, and results. Meriam (1931) then asks, "Why 'dribble' so much with all the petty details in some of these long chapters?" (p. 701). He answered his own question, suggesting that such treatment keeps the public's attention "upon the traditional arithmetic and its texts" (Meriam, 1931, p. 701).

### Discussion of the Activity Curriculum

Meriam (1934) continued his attack on the traditional school in his article "The Traditional Curriculum of the High School Is Challenged by the Activity Curriculum of the Elementary School." Meriam (1934) organized the article in three "rounds" (p. 169). In the first round, Meriam's (1934) purpose was to show in the traditional high school curriculum the policies and practices that he deemed deficient. In the second round, Meriam's (1934) purpose was to "place the activity curriculum strictly in the open" (p. 169). Meriam (1934) admitted that within the activity curriculum were "gross inadequacies" that needed to be overcome (p. 169). Meriam's (1934) third round was to show how the traditional high school could meet the challenge of the elementary school's activity curriculum.

Meriam's (1934) criticism of the high school focused primarily on his own observation and experience in secondary schools and the "representative portions" of a survey requested by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools to determine "'where we stand in secondary education.'" (p. 170). The Office of Education at Washington conducted the survey and published the results in twenty eight monographs. According to Meriam (1934), the reorganization of the secondary school, a topic of one of the monographs, was engendered by the

study to determine what organizational form of the secondary school held the most potential, the effects of the junior high school movement being of particular interest. Meriam (1934) suggested that the reorganization began with "little significant regard for the real curriculum work of the school," suggesting it was merely an "administrative affair" (p. 170). Meriam (1934) concluded that subject-matter courses in grades seven through nine as well as grades ten through twelve showed little significant change as a result of the reorganization.

Following the outline he provided at the outset of his article, Meriam (1934) then moved into his second round, the four weaknesses of the activity curriculum. First, Meriam (1934) asserted that the activity curriculum coddled and pampered children by "catering to their interests" (p. 174). Meriam's (1934) second contention of the activity curriculum argued that hard, serious work was being jeopardized by the cooperation in the social experience—too much superficial work was done "under the guise of social cooperation" (p. 174). Meriam's (1934) third contention with the activity curriculum asserted that integration had no significance in the normal activities of children, and correlating a life activity to a school subject created relationships without value and demeaned the "beautiful activities of childhood" (p. 174). Meriam's (1934) final criticism of the activity curriculum argued that activities used

to motivate the study of uninviting subjects was "belittling to our teaching procedures" and lowered "the valuation of the life activities of children" (p. 174). Meriam (1934) concluded his discussion of these weaknesses by suggesting that they were not a challenge to the traditional high school curriculum.

Completing the proposed outline for his article, Meriam (1934) moved into his third round, an explication of how the traditional high school curriculum could meet the challenge of the activity curriculum of the elementary school. Meriam (1934) first challenged "that the high school assign itself the task of serving youth (12 to 18 years of age) without regard to college entrance requirements" (p. 174). Meriam (1934) suggested that the majority of students, those who would not attend college, were sacrificed for the relatively few who did. Instead, Meriam (1934) argued that secondary schools should equip students for participation in the home, industry, and society. Meriam's (1934) second challenge required the inclusion of two hours of time each day devoted to guided leisure activities, "not in a teaching-learning situation, but as a part of normal life that rightfully belongs to youth" (p. 175). Additionally, two hours of each day called for a variety of work activities, "wood shop and metal, print shop and office, cooking and sewing, laundry and hairdressing" (Meriam, 1934, p. 175). A third two-hour block of time should be devoted to "acquiring and understanding of the

very complex environment in which we live—nature all about us and human nature all around us” (Meriam, 1934, pp. 175-176). These three two-hour periods encompassed the “range of the life of youth and does not direct all to college” (Meriam, 1934, p. 176). Meriam’s (1934) third challenge asked that the disciplines of “English grammar, the algebraic equation, the sequence of history” be recognized “so far as they have values, as strictly incidental to the larger values in the activities of real life” (p. 176). Consequently, secondary schools should use these disciplines only when the development of an activity required them (Meriam, 1934). Not surprisingly, the changes Meriam suggested emulated his curriculum at University Elementary School.

Meriam (1934) concluded his article with several concessions as well as a challenge. Meriam (1934) conceded that colleges put great pressure on secondary schools to comply with their entrance requirements; he also conceded the pressure to maintain the social custom of the traditional curriculum. Neither concession, however, carried the weight of his challenge: secondary schools hold the ultimate responsibility of service to all youth.

### Criticism of Progressive Education

In 1943, Meriam retired from active service after nineteen years as professor of education at the University of California. He spoke at a breakfast given in his honor, and School and Society published Meriam's (1943b) concluding remarks in an article entitled "Looking Educationally Toward a 'Progressive Practical World.'" Meriam (1943b) disdainfully referred to the Progressive Education Association and his membership therein until he "could no longer subscribe to its wild policy of sugar-coating the Three R's by the activities in current life" (p. 385). Neither did Meriam (1943b) approve of "'Back to the Three R's, back to the fundamentals and the discipline of the old school'" (p. 385). According to Meriam (1943b), "Progress is not made by a resumption of outmoded practices" (p. 385). Clearly, Meriam did not approve of any progressive practice that advocated the abandonment of traditional subject matter. Nor did he believe, however, that schools should return to the traditional approach. Meriam (1943b) instead preferred the methods of his experimental school at the University of Missouri, where he "insisted that the activities of children and adults are far more fundamental than the so-called fundamentals in our schools" (p. 385). He reiterated what he had said so many times before: the primary purpose of the public school was to "help children and youth to improve their normal wholesome

activities," further explaining that these activities became the curriculum (Meriam, 1943b, p. 385).

#### Basic Plan for a Curriculum, Building, and Schedule

In 1959, Meriam turned his focus from the ills of progressive education, returning again to the principles he espoused throughout his career as an educator. He wrote an article entitled "The School as Wholesome Living," in which he outlined a plan for a school that aimed to help "boys and girls do better in all the wholesome activities in which they engage" (Meriam, 1959a, p. 282). In spite of Meriam's (1959a) censure of the traditional curriculum, he did not omit the "Three-R subjects" from his "strictly basic" plan for a curriculum, building, and schedule (p. 282).

Meriam (1959a) divided the curriculum into two parts: social studies and physical activities. Meriam's (1959a) social studies included the physical, industrial, and social environment in which people lived. Meriam's idea of "social studies" echoed the sections of his University Elementary School curriculum that he called "observation" and "stories." He suggested the motion picture as the "instrument for contacting the outside world," supplementing the motion picture with readings and discussions (Meriam, 1959a, p. 282). Meriam's (1959a) physical activities included fine arts, such as music,

drama, art, dancing, and social parties; crafts, such as manual arts using textiles, wood and metal, designing and drawing, and cooking; and health, utilizing indoor and games and gymnastics and outdoor sports. These physical activities coincided with the sections of Meriam's University Elementary School curriculum called "handwork" and "play."

Meriam (1959a) proposed that the building should serve the two parts of the curriculum—one part of the building would be for social studies, the other part for the three types of physical activities. The social studies building should be able to accommodate group viewings of movies, and the primary classroom should be supplied with books and periodicals not only for the social studies, but also for leisure. Not coincidentally, leisure was one of the sections of Meriam's University School curriculum. The physical activities required an assembly room with mobile seats, equipped to view movies and the television. Craft rooms required materials for a variety of projects, and a gymnasium and outdoor field were necessary. Meriam's (1959a) suggested schedule, divided into times from 9:00 to 12:00 and 1:00 to 4:00 with lunch from 12:00-1:00, allowed a half day for each part of the curriculum, social studies and physical activities, splitting each part into different sessions so that the different parts of the building were always in use.

Meriam (1959a) believed school should be a mutual affair—the teacher was not the only one teaching and the student was not the only one learning. Just as children in their “out-of-school” lives became leaders among their friends, Meriam (1959a) believed they also did so in school because they were experiencing “normal and wholesome life,” learning as they needed (p. 282). Meriam (1959a) cautioned, however, that “discipline in high standards of achievement must be in constant demand” (p. 282). Meriam (1959a) contended that the school, parents, and the public were responsible for the bad behavior of young people. Because a young person’s “active nature prompts him to do that which is right or not right,” if he did not receive guidance in choosing right, he misbehaved (Meriam, 1959a, p. 282). Meriam (1959a) asserted that such guidance “forestalls juvenile delinquency and fosters upright living” (p. 283). In his conclusion, Meriam (1959a) reiterated his contention that the school should be “devoted to wholesome living, more and more abundant” (p. 283).

#### Tribute to Dewey

The year 1959 marked the centennial of John Dewey’s birth, and Meriam (1959b) took the occasion to honor Dewey in an article he called “John Dewey in History.” Throughout the article, Meriam (1959b) made clear Dewey’s influence on his own

theory and practice. Meriam (1959b) explicated a keynote that ran throughout Dewey's writings, saying "the adult public needs to center its attention upon the inclusive philosophy of social life; that the teaching profession center its instruction of youth upon their manner of living; and that the pupils in school look foremost to their own life activities" (p. 376). In other words, living is primary, while learning is secondary. Meriam (1959b) maintained that Dewey emphasized the activity of the child, with the task of the lay public and teachers to guide that activity and give it direction. Meriam (1959b) conceded that the public attributed to Dewey the responsibility of the "adversely credited 'progressive' education in our modern schools," but he explained that the criticism resulted from the failure of "school officials to interpret and apply adequately his [Dewey's] principles to practical problems in the conduct of our schools" (p. 377). Meriam (1959b) concluded his tribute to Dewey, saying "Dewey's school is one of wholesome living within the school regime in contrast to that of formal education of the traditional stamp" (p. 378).

#### An Emerging Philosophy

In 1960, Meriam published The Traditional and the Modern Curriculum, an Emerging Philosophy, which he described as "the product of the author's many experiences through which his

observations, experimentations, and studies have been guided" (p. vii). In the majority of his earlier publications, Meriam used examples from his laboratory school at the University of Missouri to demonstrate how he put his theories into practice. While Meriam (1960) reiterated the theories he developed and put into practice at the University of Missouri, in this final work he included examples and explication of work in which he had been involved during his tenure at the University of California.

In the first chapter of The Traditional and the Modern curriculum, an Emerging Philosophy, Meriam (1960) stated, "The title of this study implies an education before and after some change. It indicates . . . a situation of two alternatives," the two alternatives being traditional education, with an emphasis on the fundamentals, and the work of the modern school, with an emphasis on pupils' interests (p. 1). The title, however, was deceiving. Instead of choosing between the two alternatives, Meriam (1960) proposed an underlying relationship between the two alternatives, an "emerging philosophy—a continuous inquiry as to how current schools may profit by values in earlier education and extend values into schools further ahead" (p. 3). In this emerging philosophy, Meriam (1960) perceived four characteristics of the traditional and the modern school that demonstrated the change in values from the former to the latter. The first of these characteristics asserted that less emphasis

was given to preparation for the future, focusing instead on present living. The second characteristic was the continuation of the "Three-R" subject matter, but with more contacts with present living. The third characteristic involved students learning through doing, which led to a more informal program that was "in tune with the normal life of children" (Meriam, 1960, p. 11). The fourth characteristic resulted from the combination of the first three: learning by doing—creating products—led to self direction and "skillful behavior" (Meriam, 1960, p. 11). Of course, all of these characteristics also applied to Meriam's University Elementary School curriculum.

Meriam (1960) devoted a chapter of this work to "activities" and how they were used in schools, the purpose of the chapter being to clarify the concept and show its feasibility (p. 18). Meriam (1960) referenced practices of school districts throughout the country, books and periodicals by "'leaders in education,'" and direct observation (p. 18). In the next chapter, Meriam (1960) provided a list of activities collected in two of his previous works, Catalog: Units of Works, Activities, Projects, etc., to 1932 (1932) and Activities, Projects, Units of Work, Cataloged for 1932-1939 (1943a). These catalogs included activities from 271 schools, covering a time span from 1924 to 1939. The purpose of this chapter was to show how to choose appropriate classroom activities, and Meriam

(1960) included examples of both appropriate and questionable activities. The next two chapters demonstrated grade-level appropriate activities and grade-level organization of topics (subject matter) of activities. In the last chapter, Meriam (1960) provided examples of activity schools in operation, including the La Jolla School at Placentia, California, which he directed from 1930-1937, as well as the Garfield School of Santa Monica, California, which he directed from 1935-1937 (NCAB, 1965).

In his conclusion, Meriam (1960) asserted that the activity curriculum rested "upon principles more fundamental than most school men and most laymen realize" (p. 97). He contended that life was basically social adjustment, and that change was "destined to continue" (Meriam, 1960, p. 97). Meriam (1960) maintained that the emerging philosophy would "continue its course along with social changes" (p. 97). Meriam's (1960) emerging philosophy pointed to "an activity school in which the fundamentals for instruction and study consist essentially of life activities of people, young and old, in an ever increasingly complex environment within which we must all strive for adjustment," looking forward to "improving and extending action in our schools" (p. 97).

### Summary

Meriam's work, critical of traditional education, developed his major theory: school officials, teachers, and parents needed to appreciate and utilize children's natures in their normal out-of-school activities. To that end, Meriam (1909) provided a four-part principle to guide the selection and organization of the curriculum's content: the content of the curriculum should meet the real needs of the student, supply a conscious motive, demonstrate an understandable significance, and contribute to the continuity in the development of the study of a problem. Meriam (1909) implemented at University Elementary School a curriculum that manifested this principle; his curriculum began with the question "What are the normal activities of children of school age, in which the school can assist?" (p. 395). According to Meriam (1909), these activities were observation, play, stories, and handwork. Meriam (1910) believed that class study should prepare students "to face the problem, to see the method of attack; then leave to the pupil the completion of the study at home" (p. 351). Aligned with the same idea, Meriam (1917a) argued that assessment should be in terms of normal experiences rather than formal exercises. It is important to note that while Meriam (1959b) was critical of the traditional curriculum, he never advocated omitting the Three-R subjects. He was also critical of parents and teachers who failed to provide learning

opportunities in terms of children's nature and needs (Meriam, 1928). Ultimately, Meriam (1960) developed an emerging philosophy, in which he perceived four characteristics of the traditional and the modern school that demonstrated the change in values from the former to the latter. The characteristics included less emphasis on preparation for the future and more on present living, the continuation of the Three-R subject matter with more real life application, students learning through doing, and self-direction. Meriam (1959a) believed school should be a mutual affair—the teacher was not the only one teaching and the student was not the only one learning. Just as children in their "out-of-school" lives became leaders among their friends, Meriam (1959a) believed they also did so in school because they were experiencing "normal and wholesome life," learning as they needed (p. 282).

Meriam devoted his career to the field of elementary education, earning his reputation as a leading American educator through his writing, teaching, lecturing, and his work in experimental schools (NCAB, 1965). As the director of several experimental schools, primarily University Elementary School at the University of Missouri, he tested his theory and disseminated his views, greatly influencing generations of teachers (NCAB, 1965).

## CHAPTER 5

MERIAM'S THEORY AND PRACTICE AT UNIVERSITY ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL

In this chapter, Meriam's theory of education and supporting principles will be investigated through a discussion of his practices at University Elementary School at the University of Missouri. Much of the discussion of Meriam's work was derived from his book Child Life and the Curriculum (1920), in which he described every aspect of his theory and practice at University Elementary School. Before and after he published this comprehensive work, however, Meriam wrote articles and made speeches based on his work at University Elementary School. These articles and speeches often focused on the individual aspects that Meriam (1920) later combined in the construction of Child Life and the Curriculum; consequently, they proved to be valuable sources of information for the discussion. Information gleaned from Meriam's papers, which he and his wife donated to University of Missouri archives, was also incorporated into the discussion. However, as stated in "Limitations of the Study," circumstances beyond the control of the researcher posed restrictions regarding Meriam's collection.

The composition of the collection presented the greatest problem: a majority of the papers in the collection were not Meriam's primary documents of his work at University Elementary School. The primary documents included photographs of exhibits of student work and University Elementary School classes, informational pamphlets about University Elementary School, programs of closing exercises, and letters written to or about Meriam. Other papers in the collection were comprised primarily of newspaper clippings that were photocopied, several articles to each piece of paper, and often parts of articles were missing. In some situations, one article covered a part of another, or part of the article was cut off when being photocopied. Meriam wrote some of the articles, but most of the articles were written by other people about Meriam's work at University Elementary School. Consequently, the comparison of primary documents with Meriam's interpretations of his work was based solely on the photographs, pamphlets, programs, and letters in the collection. In addition, the researcher had no way to verify the completeness of the sources, and in some situations, information was definitely missing. Finally, Meriam and his wife assembled the sources, creating the question of the objectivity of the collection.

### Meriam's Criticism of Traditional Education

Early in his career as an educator, Meriam (1920) perceived a problem with the traditional educational system. The problem, as he explained it, involved three factors. The first factor, that the education of boys and girls aimed to prepare them to be more efficient in later life, stood in complete opposition to Meriam's concern (Meriam, 1960). Meriam (1920) was specifically interested in helping boys and girls live more fully while they were boys and girls. He contended that the experiences of children were too limited to plan for the future, so their interests lay in the present (Meriam, 1909). By focusing on children's lives in the present, Meriam asserted that the schools also contributed to the preparation of children for later life (n.d., "Educator Comes as Advisor to Popular School," Meriam Papers, 59-60).

Meriam's (1920) second factor was the subject matter of the traditional curriculum. Meriam (1920) suggested the traditional curriculum was aimless because it had no purpose other than to occupy children until they were mature enough to prepare for some position in life or to enter an occupation for which they were unprepared. Meriam (1920) also characterized the curriculum as lifeless, focused on artificial studies consisting of content intended to be learned passively instead of problems to be studied actively. Meriam (1909) considered the curriculum to be

an organization of desegregated, unrelated experiences. Any attempt at correlation was arbitrary, making it completely unnatural and superficial. The curriculum, according to Meriam (1909), was congested, with a rising number of subjects resulting from the growing complexity of civilization. Meriam (1920) concluded that any curriculum that was aimless, lifeless, disconnected, and congested was also wasteful, filled with busy work to occupy a student's time until the law no longer required him to attend school.

Meriam's (1920) third factor was the social and industrial life and "an environment full of physical phenomena of increasing interest to people as our civilization rapidly develops" (p. vi). According to Meriam (1920), the curriculum was untimely, paying too much attention to the past and too little attention to the present, "an age of intensely interesting progress" (p. 68). While Meriam (1920) agreed that traditional subject matter could be used to teach children, he developed and put into practice at University Elementary School a theory that espoused using activities in which children were interested to teach them reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Meriam (1920) argued that his curriculum was not an effort to escape the traditional curriculum; rather, he was trying to get close as possible to the lives of children outside of school. While the traditional curriculum was receiving

unfavorable criticism, Meriam (1920) noted evidence of an inclination to ask that public schools give more consideration to existing problems in the life of the home, community, and nation. Meriam (1959a) believed his curriculum, based on real experiences, led to the formation of good habits that ultimately prepared children for life at home and in the community. While Meriam (1920) conceded that his curriculum was not a "panacea for all the ills of elementary education," he emphasized that University Elementary School at the University of Missouri demonstrated modern school practices that "warranted the critical consideration of school officials, teachers, and school communities" (vii).

Meriam (1960) perceived the problem as an educator to be, "How can I help these boys and girls to do better in all those wholesome activities in which they normally engage?" (p. 98). It was this problem to which he devoted his career. At University Elementary School, students were always busy with motivating work or wholesome leisure activities (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, Meriam Papers). Meriam considered this to be the secret of diligence in school—students were self-directed and worked well if they were given the opportunity to be mutually helpful when doing things that met their needs. Not surprisingly, as Frances Harden, a visitor to University Elementary School, noticed, students developed an interest in

working together, consequently gaining and understanding of citizenship and loyalty, key factors in a democratic society (1917, "Visiting Teacher Is Pleased," Meriam Papers, 83). Even while helping children live more efficiently while they were children, a by-product of Meriam's method was preparation for the future. Some of the photographs included in Meriam's collection supported Ms. Harden's observation. Photograph 5-1 depicts students sitting together at tables. While there appears to be little interaction between some of the students, others are clearly working together.



Photograph 5-1

From Meriam, Junius L., Papers, 1900-1944 (C965\_11), Western Historical Manuscript Collection—Columbia, MO. Reprinted with permission.

Instead of focusing on the subject matter of the traditional curriculum, Meriam (1920) used the "normal experiences of children and people in whom they are concerned"

as the subjects for study (p. 13). Rather than selecting the curriculum in terms of math, geography, and grammar, Meriam (1909) selected the curriculum in terms of children's activities and adult recreation. While Meriam (1920) did not advocate abandoning traditional subject matter, he maintained that it should only be considered when it functioned in the work of pupils. In fact, Meriam argued that traditional subject matter had a more important place in his curriculum than in the curriculum of traditional school because his curriculum was based on the natural activities of the child (1909, "Would Map Studies To Suit Child's View," Meriam Papers, 65). As a result, the children learned to read, write, and draw when they needed to (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, Meriam Papers). Skills in the Three-R subjects improved more as they served to enhance the life activities of children (Meriam, 1960).

#### Meriam's Plan for Making Curricula

Clearly, Meriam (1920) strongly believed that while the traditional curriculum had met the needs of the past and was developing in an attempt to meet the needs of a rapidly changing society, it was not keeping pace with the "conditions of modern life" (p. 71). Meriam (1920) asserted that mere changes in the traditional curriculum were not sufficient; instead, he called

for the making of a new curriculum. To differentiate between changing a curriculum and making a new one, Meriam (1920) outlined the most common methods of revising curricula as well as a plan for making curricula.

According to Meriam (1920), the usual method of changing curricula involved one or any combination of five procedures: omission, enrichment, motivation, determination of minimum essentials, and introduction of the practical. Omission, obviously, meant removing elements from the curriculum, justifying the omission by the lack of correlation between the subject matter and life outside of school. However, Meriam (1920) asserted that omission was not constructive or economical in the development of curricula. Furthermore, because it was not a principle for permanent prevention of congestion, it provided only temporary relief (Meriam, 1909).

Enrichment occurred by increasing subjects, themes, and details and by attempting to teach abstract concepts through concrete situations (Meriam, 1909). Increasing subjects, themes, and details proved only to crowd the curriculum further, and teaching abstract concepts through concrete situations proved unnatural.

Motivation attempted to bolster tedious work by introducing other relevant subject matter that strongly appealed to children (Meriam, 1920). These attempts, Meriam (1920) asserted, were

only provisional strategies, not basic renovation. If school work needed to be vitalized, it was not appropriate for children.

Determining the minimum essentials meant modifying the content of the curriculum based on the use of subject matter in out-of-school activities (Meriam, 1920). Meriam (1920), however, questioned the necessity of the Three-R subjects, suggesting that life outside of school included topics for study that could not be "pigeonholed in the traditional subjects" (p. 74).

Finally, the introduction of "'practical subjects'" occurred when schools realized they were not effectively contributing to the community (Meriam, 1920, p. 74). While the introduction of practical subjects was an improvement, it was only partial, making the school "practical only in spots" (Meriam, 1920, p. 74).

#### Obligations of the Curriculum Maker

Meriam (1920) asserted that the purpose of school was to serve society as well as the individual as a part of society. Consequently, Meriam (1920) explained, the source of guiding principles in making curricula was in social problems and conditions. As such, a curriculum maker had certain obligations. First, the curriculum maker had to feel completely unrestricted by the traditional curriculum. Meriam (1920) quickly pointed out

that he did not mean the curriculum maker could not use the subject matter of the traditional school. The curriculum maker did not have to throw away the curriculum of the traditional school, but he did have to effectively supply the new demands, which meant discriminatingly selecting the materials related to school work and present needs. Any use of the traditional curriculum should be limited to that in which students discovered something that contributed to their needs, thus providing a real motive (Meriam, 1909). Ultimately, the curriculum maker had to be willing to use or throw away parts of or the entire traditional curriculum and introduce materials most effective to the work of the school (Meriam, 1920).

According to Meriam (1920), the curriculum maker's second obligation was to consult with sociologists and psychologists and with experimental schools, thus precluding a curriculum that was particular to the curriculum maker himself. The third obligation for the curriculum maker was to construct the principles of his curriculum to meet all circumstances and situations and make the details applicable to all locations and conditions. In other words, students anywhere should understand the content and appreciate its significance (Meriam, 1909). Lastly, the curriculum maker had to be faithful to his work and uncompromising with the conditions he wanted to improve, freeing

himself from "local limitations" but never being "indifferent or inconsiderate of them" (Meriam, 1920, p. 76).

The curriculum maker's obligations made up only part of Meriam's (1920) plan for curriculum making. Additionally, Meriam (1920) included consideration of social conditions and problems, which provided the foundation for educational principles. Meriam (1920) also recommended being cognizant of current educational trends in order to guard against dependency on them. Finally, Meriam (1920) provided five principles for the construction of curricula, principles founded on "social problems and the interests of the individual" (p. 79).

#### Consideration of Social Conditions and Current Educational Trends

Meriam (1920) asserted that teachers studied subject matter and methods of teaching and school administrators spent time on organization, management, and finance, but neither group devoted enough attention to the study of social problems and the school's opportunity for social service. While Meriam (1920) maintained that social efficiency was the common goal of educators, he believed that most school people did not necessarily understand the goal because it was always presented in general, indefinite terms. Additionally, Meriam (1920) asserted that school administrators and teachers did not read

current social studies and were unaware of the social conditions in which they were working. Consequently, they were uninformed regarding how the school should function in relation to the social environment.

Meriam (1920) urged educators to keep abreast of social problems, studying life activities, and consider school work in relation to the environment they observed. He asserted that the work of the school should contribute to practical life—"all the profitable and enjoyable acts that make up wholesome living" (Meriam, 1920, p. 105). Meriam (1934) believed the school's obligation was to provide an education that prepared students for participation at home, at work, and in society. This obligation could only be met by teaching students to study, in the concrete, the diversity of human relationships and industrial activities that comprise community life (Meriam, 1920). Only a school that took its subject matter from real life could avoid the abstractions of the subjects of the traditional curriculum (Meriam, 1934).

Meriam (1920) noted a trend in educational changes, referencing private schools in Europe and the United States in which the work was adapted to modern social conditions. Meriam (1920) also discussed universities that encouraged change in secondary schools by developing more liberal entrance requirements, secondary schools that began providing industrial

education, and elementary schools that devoted more attention to the study of activities of the community. Additionally, Meriam (1920) discussed other agencies that contributed to the trend of studying contemporary social conditions. These included textbook companies that developed more practical books, the increasing number of publications on practical subjects, movies that portrayed life activities, the growth of junior civic leagues that connected the school and the community, the demand for the wider use of the school facilities, and legislative acts encouraging the study of modern life.

Meriam (1920) noted that some of the changes focused on efficiency, measuring results in terms of real life, while others maintained a focus on the traditional curriculum, measuring results in terms of the Three-R subjects. In these two views existed the conflict that thwarted progress: people wanted a greater practical outcome for school work, but they also saw in the Three-R subjects the only content for school work.

#### Meriam's Five Principles for Curricula Construction

Meriam (1920) provided five principles for the construction of curricula. The first principle stated, "The curriculum should contribute primarily to enabling boys and girls to be efficient in what they are now doing, only secondarily to preparing them to be efficient later" (p. 137). Meriam (1928) argued that

educators had incorrectly assumed that children's time was best spent passively learning, soaking up knowledge like sponges. Instead, Meriam (1928) contended, childhood was primarily a period of doing, and secondarily a period of learning. Meriam (1959a) emphasized the "all-sufficient objective" of elementary education should be "To help boys and girls do better in all the wholesome activities in which they normally engage" (p. 282). He knew, however, that this purpose implied a reference to the immediate present, which was at odds with the traditional school practice and therefore not likely to be accepted (Meriam, 1920). Consequently, Meriam (1920) devoted much attention to explaining his claim that school work should be "directed primarily in the interests of the present" and to showing "how efficiency in the present includes adequate provision for the future" (p. 137).

Meriam (1920) maintained that because children were not in school long enough to prepare sufficiently for later life, the more reasonable expectation was to help them meet present needs. Meriam conceded, however, that even in emphasizing the present, parents and schools had to be cognizant of their obligation "to contribute as much as possible to the preparation of children for the exigencies of later life"; consequently, arrangements had to be made for such preparation (p. 158). Because utilizing different curriculums for each purpose was unfeasible, Meriam (1920) asserted that one curriculum should serve both purposes.

According to Meriam (1920), the traditional curriculum primarily served the purpose of preparing children for the future, which would not be a problem if life's needs were in terms of the subject matter of the traditional curriculum. However, Meriam (1920) contended that "the real experiences of the merchant, the banker, the lawyer, the farmer, and the laborer" were not "in terms of arithmetic, geography, and language" (p. 158). Consequently, the schools were not sufficiently serving the needs of the individual or the community (Meriam, 1909). As a result, Meriam (1920) concluded, studies more closely related to the activities of everyday life were arguably preferable as preparation for meeting needs later in life. The curriculum needed to be more realistic and productive, thus creating a relationship more specific to everyday life (Meriam, 1909).

Meriam (1920) believed that children's lives included a simpler form of the variety of the activities of which adult's lives consisted. Therefore, enabling children to do better in their normal activities and interests brought them into contact with the range of activities that would make up their lives as adults. Meriam (1920) admitted, however, that many of the activities in which students participated in school would not directly function in their adult lives; additionally, students

would encounter experiences in their adult lives for which they had no preparation as children.

Meriam (1920) noted that the traditional curriculum, which focused on preparing students for later life, provided an answer to the adult question, "How shall the boy prepare for the duties he must meet at my stage of life?" (p. 167). The organization and management of schools, Meriam explained, were arranged from the adult's perspective rather than the child's (1909, "A New Curriculum," Meriam Papers, 69). Throughout his school years, the child asked why he needed to learn the subject being studied, and the teacher responded that he would need it in the future. The child, however, whose perspective was limited by experience, sought to answer the question "How can I get the very most out of what I am now doing?" (Meriam, 1920, p. 167). Meriam argued that children were too inexperienced to care about the future and were interested in school subjects only to the extent that they contributed to their immediate interests (1909, "Would Map Studies To Suit Child's View," Meriam Papers, 65). While being told that he would need to know something in the future temporarily silenced a student, it did not pique his interest or engender within him any enthusiasm for the subject (1909, "A New Curriculum," Meriam Papers, 69). According to Meriam, the perfect curriculum had several qualifications: "there would be present only what meets the real, present need

of the child, only that in which the pupil has a conscious motive, only that which the pupil can comprehend and appreciate, and only whatever contributes to the continuity of development in the special problem being studied'" (1909, "Would Map Studies To Suit Child's View," Meriam Papers, 65). The curriculum Meriam put into practice at University Elementary School fulfilled these qualifications. University Elementary School's curriculum was one of present activities, which Meriam (1920) believed prepared students better for later efficiency by providing "the opportunity to exercise those traits that contribute so much to efficiency in all phases of life" (p. 168).

Meriam's (1920) second principle stated, "The curriculum should be selected directly from real life and should be expressed in terms of the activities and the environments of people" (p. 171). According to Meriam traditional subjects did not meet children's interests, while "lessons from actual life are found to be very valuable and very interesting" (n.d., "Meriam Idea of Education Complimented," Meriam Papers, 81). The most reasonable study, Meriam (1920) explained, focused on the concrete and the practical in everyday life rather than the "abstract and speculative so characteristic of the traditional curriculum" (p. 171). Meriam (1909) contended that schools had not kept up with the recent changes in society that created a demand for a more practical and productive curriculum. As a

result, students often discovered that their elementary education was almost worthless in actual life work, and they were forced to learn the principles and fundamentals of their jobs under the direction instead of foremen and managers (n.d., "Fruit from the Tree, Meriam Papers, 64). Instead of focusing on the subjects of the traditional curriculum, Meriam advocated emphasis on "the things that every young man is compelled to learn after he leaves school" (n.d., "Fruit from the Tree, Meriam Papers, 64).

Meriam (1920) contended that "a curriculum in terms of the concrete and the practical" did not disregard the subject matter in math, geography, or language (p. 203). Rather, through their real-life studies, children utilized concepts in math, geography, and language (Meriam, 1909). Meriam (1920) argued that children's understanding of these subjects was more effective as a result of the motive through which the learning transpired. Meriam (1909) did not abandon the Three-R subjects; however, he insisted that the study of real life was more crucial than the "study of formal generalizations with labored application to life" (p. 398). The value of the two types of subject matter was determined by their contribution to real life, which, according to Meriam (1920) rendered the traditional Three-R subjects subordinate in rank to instruction in the practical interactions of everyday life.

Meriam's (1920) third principle for the construction of curricula stated, "The curriculum should provide for great scope and flexibility to meet individual differences in interests and abilities" (p. 207). This principle worked in direct opposition to studies and reports that indicated the existence of "the average boy," who served as a standard (Meriam, 1920, p. 207). According to Meriam (1920), teachers orchestrated school work and evaluated results based on this standard. However, Meriam contended that students should not be measured by a standard because every person varied in interests and abilities (n.d., "Curriculum Not Practical," Meriam Papers, 14). In assuming the existence of a standard, however, teachers did not have to concern themselves with the different interests and abilities of their students (Meriam, 1920).

Unlike traditional educators, Meriam (1920) recognized the importance of individual differences in students' development and adjustment. Meriam (1920) also perceived the importance of individual differences in the different activities in which children participated outside of school and the occupations people chose after they left school. Meriam (1960) utilized the time he allotted in the schedule for leisure reading to provide for the varying interests and abilities of children. During this time, children, under the guidance of the teacher, pursued their individual interests through serious study or reading for

pleasure. Whether the school's aim was to help children live more complete lives in the present, as Meriam (1920) advocated, or to help children live more complete lives in the future, as traditional education advocated, providing for individual differences was crucial.

Meriam's (1920) fourth principle stated, "The curriculum should be so organized that it will admit of easy rearrangement of the schedule for any day, of the work for any grade, and even of the transfer of work from grade to grade" (p. 237). While Meriam (1920) had no opposition to organization, he believed that administrators and teachers gave it "an undue amount of attention" (p. 238). Though Meriam and his teachers arranged a schedule and a definite plan, the organization of University Elementary School was flexible enough to meet the needs of the students (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, Meriam Papers).

Meriam's (1920) idea of organization called for no specific amount of work to be accomplished in a specific amount of time or in a specific year. He set no minimum requirements for any grade, allowing promotion from grade to grade based on one year of experience. Likewise, graduation from elementary school meant only that a student had completed activities in the school for seven years. Meriam (1960) utilized classroom methods that emphasized finding information rather than memorizing it,

increased discussion and reduced recitation, and focused on the normal activities of children instead of formal drill. Teachers gave no formal tests or examinations, instead basing their evaluations on students' daily work (Meriam, 1920).

Meriam (1920) explained some considerations which were affected by this alternative organizational structure. According to Meriam (1920), the first consideration affected was the program of study. Rather than being selected in terms of abstract subject matter, the content of the curriculum was selected in terms of concrete experiences, children's activities and adult pursuits (Meriam, 1909). The most natural program was one of interchangeable topics, making it possible to study a topic in any grade at any time during the school year (Meriam, 1920).

Meriam (1920) explained that the flexible organization structure also affected the management of the school. For example, the concern for the work accomplished by the students, their industrious attitudes, and their ability to apply their knowledge was greater than the concern for regularity in attendance. However, attendance was not a serious problem when the school work and the flexible organization of the school appealed to students. University Elementary School students enjoyed school and considered it a second home (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, Meriam Papers). Meriam

(1920) also believed that "thoughtful direction under a flexible organization" more closely resembled real life than "mechanical routine under a rigid organization" (p. 248). The result was students who were independent, original thinkers (1912, "Where School-Going Is Fun," Meriam Papers, 82).

Another consideration for school management involved fatigue among students. Meriam (1920) asserted that the fatigue resulted from the effort to comply with organization and routine instead of the effort used in productive studies. According to Meriam (1920), when children were permitted to be more individual in their work and their own needs controlled the energy they expended, they did not experience as much fatigue. Consequently, students benefit from the maximum amount of training for the time they were required to be in school (n.d., "Curriculum Not Practical," Meriam Papers, 14).

Meriam's (1920) final principle for curriculum making addressed two areas: work and leisure. His principle stated, "The curriculum should lead the pupil to appreciate both work and leisure and to develop a habit of engaging in both" (Meriam, 1920, p. 255). Clearly, the traditional school had no issue with the idea of teaching students to appreciate and engage in work; many students could not complete the amount of work assigned by the teacher in the time allowed (n.d., "Curriculum Not Practical," Meriam Papers, 14). Meriam however, contended that

leisure time was one phase of life, and the school had the obligation to teach children how to use that time well (n.d., "Teaching through Play," Meriam Papers, 15). In fact, students found time for leisure regardless of whether the school allowed for it: "They also find time for play—even against the rules. Play will come out, usually in the form of mischief" (Meriam, 1920, p. 261).

Meriam (1920) did not advocate having students study about leisure. If students learned to work by working, Meriam (1920) explained, they learned to use their leisure time by being provided with it and given guidance in using that time. Meriam (1920) further explained that younger children needed less time for work and more time for leisure, while older students needed less time for leisure and more time for work. Additionally, the line between work and leisure was not always absolute since work for one student might be leisure for another.

Meriam (1920) asserted that emphasizing leisure activities in school reduced the likelihood that children would turn to such places as "playhouses, clubs, pool rooms and the like" for entertainment, relying instead on the higher forms of leisure found in literature, music, art, games, and other social activities (p. 273). Meriam (1959a) also believed that the school, the parents, and the public were responsible for teaching children to develop the habit of "finding wholesome

occupation" when not in school (p. 282). In doing so, the school prevented juvenile delinquency by providing children with something to do during the time children might commit crimes.

#### Meriam's School Studies

Meriam's (1920) curriculum at University Elementary School addressed each of his five principles of curricula making. The curriculum's primary aim was to provide the most sufficient adjustment today, which, according to Meriam (1909) would prepare them best for sufficient adjustment tomorrow. The activities within the curriculum were based on the activities of people in real life, both children and adults (Meriam, 1960). The schedule provided flexibility for a range of individual interests and abilities. The curriculum's organization allowed for easy rearrangement of the schedule for any day, of the work for any grade, and transfer of work from one grade to the next (Meriam, 1920). Finally, Meriam's (1920) curriculum led students to appreciate both work and leisure and to develop the habit of engaging in both.

Meriam divided his curriculum into four subjects: observation, play, stories, and handwork (Wells, 1921, "A School for Real Boys and Girls, Meriam Papers, 87-88). Meriam admitted that he did not teach traditional subjects as such (n.d., "U.S. Explains Local School," Meriam Papers, 13). In studying present-

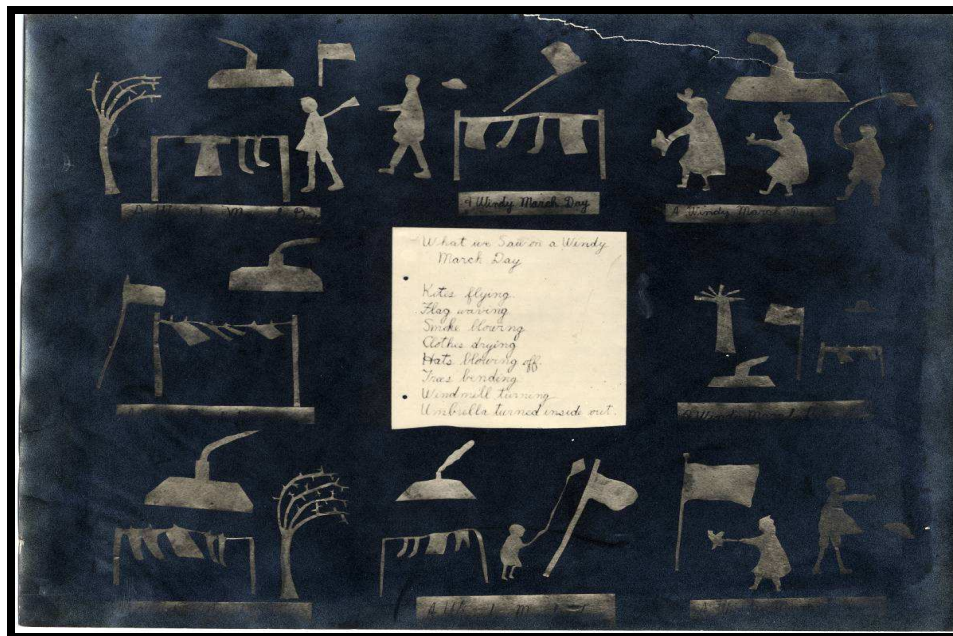
day problems, though, students obtained practice in history, math, geography, language, and other traditional subjects. Meriam provided the example of the sixth-grade topic, transportation. Students spent eight weeks studying railroads, steamship lines, and highways; animal power and the use of electricity in travel; and the car and the airplane. At the conclusion of their study, children knew such details as what kind of wood airplanes were made of, what kind of metal was used in their construction, what the weight of the engine was, and what the propellers were made of (1918, "Why Is an Airplane? Or Why Is a Zeppelin?", Meriam Papers, 29).

#### Observation

Meriam (1920) explained that he included observation as a school subject "as one important factor in natural development" (pp. 290-291). For example, as children grew, they indicated an interest in those around them and eventually expressed interest in the activities of adults (1909, "Would Map Studies To Suit Child's View," Meriam Papers, 65). According to Meriam (1920), directly studying the environment would enable students' ultimate adjustment through "continual readjustment" (p. 291). Meriam's (1920) program allowed for variation to adapt to local and personal conditions. Additionally, while Meriam (1920) designated work for certain grades, the topics studied were

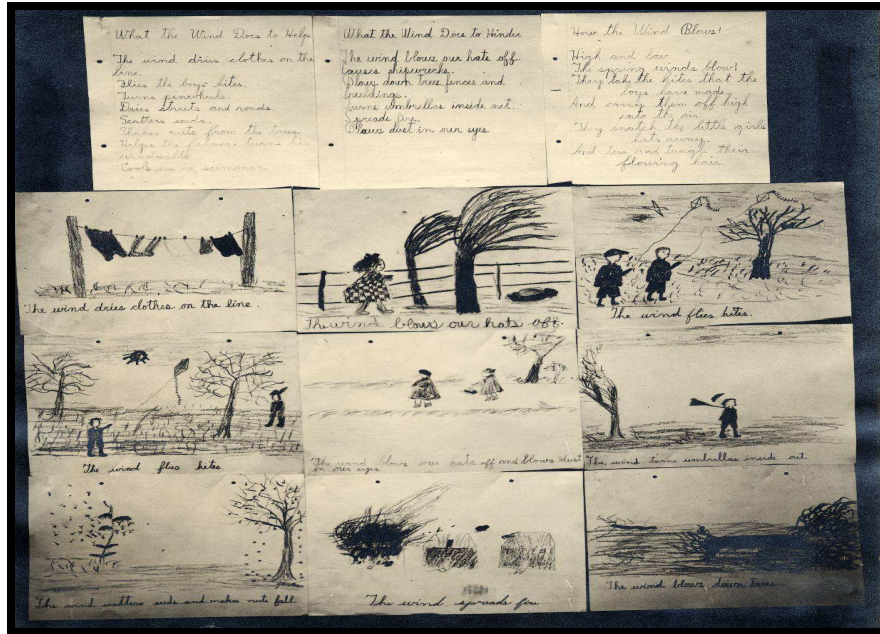
adapted to the individual rather than the individual adapting to the topics.

In grades I and II, Meriam (1920) arbitrarily divided the work into plant life, animal life, earth and sky, and people. Meriam based instruction on the basis of immediate needs of the children; the work was not exercise in skill (1911, "Natural Education," Meriam Papers, 74b). Teachers helped children understand the things they saw and heard, not as instructive material, but as things in which they were interested. Photographs 5-2 and 5-3 demonstrate the results of a study of the wind in grades I and II, students having produced both pictures and written descriptions.



Photograph 5-2

From Meriam, Junius L., Papers, 1900-1944 (C965\_28), Western Historical Manuscript Collection—Columbia, MO. Reprinted with permission.



Photograph 5-3

From Meriam, Junius L., Papers, 1900-1944 (C965\_32), Western Historical Manuscript Collection—Columbia, MO. Reprinted with permission.

In grades III and IV, Meriam proposed a subject he called "local studies," and topics varied according to the location (1911, "Natural Education," Meriam Papers, 74b). However, some commonalities existed, as most communities had a post office, fire department, grocery store, and bank (Meriam, 1920). In grades V and VI or even V through VIII, Meriam implemented what he called "social-industrial" studies, which included such topics as recreations, mining, lumbering, manufacturing, transportation, and government and social activities (1911, "Natural Education," Meriam Papers, 74b). Meriam limited instruction in all grades to concrete activities but did not

utilize these activities to provide instruction in traditional subjects. Instead, Meriam's plan was to encourage children's interests, which then developed into adult interests.

Meriam's (1920) two primary concerns with method were how students received the information and how they expressed what they learned. Meriam (1920) believed direct observation was the most effective way to get information. Consequently, Meriam (1920) included excursions outside of the classroom as part of the study. The students took excursions to the post office, blacksmith shops, the water and light plants, the fire department, shoe factory, and other plants located in Columbia (1904, "Children Rule in This School," Meriam Papers, 14)). Informal classroom conferences preceded the excursions, and systematic organization played no role in the excursions (Meriam, 1920). During the excursions, students observed closely but did not take notes; Meriam (1920) contended that what students could not remember was not worth writing down. Finally, students supplemented the excursion with further study and discussion in the classroom (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, Meriam Papers). They investigated arithmetic, geography, history, and poetry in their endeavors to learn more about these local studies.

Textbooks, however, were not sufficient for supplementation: "in place of forty copies of the text, the

forty pupils should have forty different books, which means nearly forty times the information usually supplied" (Meriam, 1920, p. 298). Frances Harden (1917), who visited University Elementary School in 1917, commented on the schools "well filled library" and how the students used it "constantly in gathering material for their work and in finding the explanation of questions arising in their reading" (personal correspondence, Meriam Papers). Harden (1917) also made note of Meriam's methods in the written report of her visit: "The children take excursions and visit local industries. These are used as the basis for reading, writing, drawing, language and number" (personal correspondence, Meriam Papers).

Because the excursions and readings encouraged students to talk, class conferences were arranged to allow them the opportunity to do so (Meriam, 1920). Meriam (1920) believed that the traditional school required too many written reports, so he implemented their use only when students felt they contributed to their understanding. As a result, Meriam contended, his students actually wrote more, had a larger vocabulary, and produced better work in general than they would have in a traditional school (1909, "Would Map Studies To Suit Child's View," Meriam Papers, 65).

Units in the subject of observation were plentiful at University Elementary School. One fourth-grade unit of study in

the subject of observation involved the local dairy and transpired over the course of ten days (n.d., "Praise for U[niversity] of M[issouri] Elementary School," Meriam Papers, 91). The unit included a three-hour excursion, readings from twenty sources, chemical experiments in the souring of milk, science work in the study of cows, vocabulary likely to be misspelled, and liquid and avoirdupois weights. A fifth grade unit of the lumber industry lasted twenty-four days and included four excursions—to the forest, the sawmill, the planning mill, and the lumberyard. The unit also included readings from eighty sources, eighteen compositions, twenty-three concrete problems, board and square measure, and science work on trees and other forest products.

Fifth and sixth grade students visited the tax collector's office, learning how, when, and why taxes were assessed and collected and what was done with the money afterward (n.d., "Pupils Visit County Offices," Meriam Papers, 29). Sixth grade students visited the coal mine after studying the production of coal (n.d., "Sixth-Grade Pupils Visit Coal Mine, Meriam Papers, 29). Fourth grade students visited several grocery stores and created a list of products found in a grocery store as well as questions to ask a grocer (n.d., "Young Students Study Stores," Meriam Papers, 29). Students learned how foods were shipped and kept; they also learned about liquid and dry measures. Students

calculated the cost of their own meals each day as well as recording and calculating their families' grocery bills. Students also compared the cost of foods. Third grade students visited a dentist's office in conjunction with a study on teeth and their composition; number; differences in permanent and temporary as well as their shape, size, and use; their treatment and general care; and their decay (n.d., "Dentist Acts As Teacher," Meriam Papers, 29). The dentist showed them dental instruments, different kinds of fillings, and the method of making artificial teeth and plaster casts. Ironically, the week after the third graders visited the dentist, they visited the confectioner to learn how candy was made (n.d., "Pupils Study Candy Science," Meriam Papers, 30).

Meriam (1920) emphasized attention to the topic of observation without allusion to the Three-R subjects. He quickly pointed out, however, that effective study of any topic required a substantial amount of material from the Three R's (Meriam, 1920). In pursuing real-life problems, students received practice in reading, writing, and arithmetic (n.d., "U.S. Explains Local School," Meriam Papers, 13). Meriam considered the training in these traditional subjects the offshoot rather than the end itself. Therefore, the major difference in the treatment of the Three-R subjects between Meriam's (1920) program and the traditional school was in the way they were

presented. Upon visiting University Elementary School, Frances Harden (1917) observed, "No formal work is done in reading, writing, arithmetic or grammar. Reading grows out of a desire to know more about the subjects which they are studying" (personal correspondence, Meriam Papers). Indeed, Meriam (1920) maintained that the best way to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic was "not to teach them as such, but to use their content in the most effective way possible in the study of phases of real life" (p. 300). According to Meriam (1920), knowledge of any of the Three-R subjects was pointless apart from its function in real situations.

### Play

The second subject in Meriam's (1920) program was play. While Meriam (1920) allowed play a coordinate position with the other three studies—observation, stories, and handwork, he did not allow as much time for play as he did for the others. Meriam (1920) included play as a subject based on the principle that the purpose of the school was to enable students "to do better in all of their activities that are normal and wholesome" (p. 305). Meriam also believed play deserved a place in the curriculum because it brought pleasure to children (n.d., "Elementary School Has Organized Play," Meriam Papers, 32). Meriam knew that teachers who could make use of children's

instinct to play laid the best foundation for their education (n.d., "Teaching through Play," Meriam Papers, 15). While play was one the normal and wholesome activities of children, Meriam (1920) argued that it could not be assumed that children played well enough. Consequently, the direction of children's play, or the lack thereof, created problems (n.d., "Teaching through Play," Meriam Papers, 15). While Meriam (1920) agreed that play was improved by practice, he understood that teachers had to be leaders in children's play as they were leaders in their academic instruction. Organization and help from the teacher attempted to direct children and help them play with more enjoyment (n.d., "Elementary School Has Organized Play," Meriam Papers, 32).

Meriam (1920) included a variety of games and play activities in his program. The games included individual and group competitive games, physical games, mental games, singing games, and outdoor games. The play activities included making collections; preparing puzzles, tricks, and magic performances; photography and blue printing; social, literacy, and dramatic activities; typewriting and job printing; and constructive occupations. Meriam (1920) asserted that all of these activities met children's present play needs and contributed to preparing children for occupations they might pursue later in life. He allowed no more than four hours a week for play activities and

gave students the opportunity to find play activities that interested them (n.d., "Elementary School Has Organized Play," Meriam Papers, 32).

### Stories

Meriam (1920) presented the third subject in his program—stories—as way for children to spend leisure. The school selected literature that satisfied the varied interests of the children and made provision in the schedule for reading for pleasure. Since not all children in the lower grades could read, stories were sometimes told, dramatized, or pictured. Photographs 5-4 and 5-5 depict dramatizations of stories.



Photograph 5-4

From Meriam, Junius L., Papers, 1900-1944 (C965\_25), Western Historical Manuscript Collection—Columbia, MO. Reprinted with permission.



Photograph 5-5

From Meriam, Junius L., Papers, 1900-1944 (C965\_24), Western Historical Manuscript Collection—Columbia, MO. Reprinted with permission.

According to Meriam, the stories became more real when they were represented this way (Chenery, 1916, "Public Schools," Meriam Papers, 89). Meriam explained that while the teachers told many stories, the students told even more. Telling and acting out stories laid the foundation for literary work (1912, "Where School-Going Is Fun," Meriam Papers, 82). For example, first graders read between twelve and thirty books a year, and second graders read between twenty-five and fifty (Chenery, 1916, "Public Schools," 89).

The reading material selected for the lower grades varied so much that classification was "impracticable" (Meriam, 1920, p. 347). In the upper grades, however, the reading material

included fables, fairy tales, myths, legends, and wonder stories; travel, exploration, adventure, scenery, manners, and customs; nature; industries, invention, and science; history and biography; character study; and humor.

Meriam firmly stated that the purpose of the time set apart for pleasure reading was the enjoyment of stories, not learning to read (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, Meriam Papers). The story hour helped children develop "an intelligent appreciation for good literature and a consequent habit of reading only that kind'" (n.d., "Boys Like Adventure Stories," Meriam Papers, 23). He conceded, however, that it may be expected that students "will learn to read while engaged in the enjoyment of stories" (Meriam, 1920, p. 357). In reading as many books as they did, students naturally learned to read good stories and to read them well (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, Meriam Papers).

Meriam (1920) required students to practice both silent and oral reading. For oral reading, Meriam suggested that students sit in a circle in small groups. Photograph 5-6 depicts such an arrangement. Sitting in a circle provided the audience that sitting in rows did not allow; breaking into smaller groups allowed more students the opportunity to read aloud. In the lower grades, Meriam suggested both silent and oral reading

during the hour, but he suggested a full hour of silent reading for the upper grades.



Photograph 5-6

Meriam, Junius L., Papers, 1900-1944 (C965\_12),  
Western Historical Manuscript Collection—Columbia, MO.  
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Leisure reading also yielded other valuable results: students learned to read by becoming familiar with letters, sounds, and combinations (Meriam, 1920). Students learned to read aloud with expression, and they became good listeners. Finally, extensive reading provided information that proved valuable later in the students' lives and developed in them the habit of reading as well as good taste in their selection of reading material.

### Handwork

Meriam (1920) based his inclusion of handwork as one of the subjects in his program on his purpose of elementary education—"to help boys and girls do better in all those wholesome activities in which they normally engage" (p. 371). Meriam believed that "handwork is a good companion for head work" (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, p. 16, Meriam Papers). In consideration of individual differences, students were given the opportunity to choose what they wanted to make based on the materials to be used (Meriam, 1920). Children made gifts for parents or friends and bags, gaskets, and boxes they wanted for themselves (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, Meriam Papers). In the lower grades, children chose from a variety of designs (Meriam, 1920). The older children, however, were encouraged to plan their own designs (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, Meriam Papers). Some of the types of projects, based on materials used, included the following:

*Cord, yarn, rugs:* Bags, mats, rugs, holders, hammocks, tatting edging, stocking caps or sailor's knots.

*Paper, cardboard:* Boxes, poster work, lamp shade, bookmarks, portfolio covers, blotter pad, reminder pad.

*Reed, raffia, tissue-paper rope:* Baskets, mats, jardinières, bird nests, hats.

*Textiles:* Table runners, whisk brooms, holder, slipper cases, needlebooks, doilies, bookmarks, napkins rings, laundry bags, cushion covers,

magazine covers, silver case, wall pockets, articles of clothing, bibs.

*Wood:* Boxes, spool rack, necktie holder, footstool, fox and geese board, bread board, boats, water wheel, weather vane, bookrack.

*Metal:* Pin tray, paper knife, bookmark, blotter pad, lamp shade, paper weight, watch fob. (Meriam, 1920, p. 377)

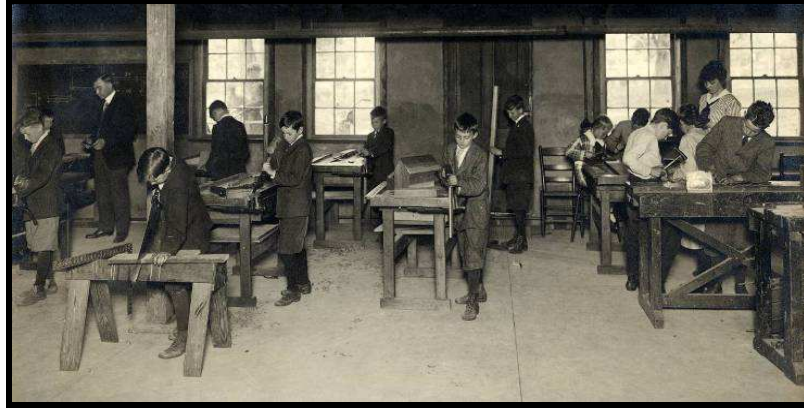
Meriam (1920) allotted an hour to an hour and a half for handwork. Regarding designs and specifications, Meriam (1920) urged consideration for the value and aesthetic appeal of the completed project: "Artistic design and accurate specifications should precede all constructions" (p. 378). While Meriam (1920) warned that handwork was not used an opportunity to teach math and drawing, he insisted that students make accurate calculations and careful drawings. Meriam (1920) also encouraged discussion of the work, with the focus on purpose, structure, materials, and artistic finish, as a means of improvement. Finally, Meriam exhibited all projects, not just the best ones (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, Meriam Papers). The exhibit was continuous, with newly finished projects replacing the old (Meriam, 1920).

Though Meriam insisted that handwork was "not that of a trade school" and "no attempt was made to train skilled workmen," handwork did introduce children to occupations they might pursue in later life (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, p. 16, Meriam Papers). However, it also gave

them another way to use their time at home (Meriam, 1920). In addition to using their leisure time at home to play and read, students could occupy themselves in making things "useful or artistic" (Meriam, 1920, p. 380). Consequently, instructing students in handwork provided the school an opportunity to benefit the home. Meriam clearly maintained the standards of the time with regards to gender roles, as many of the photographs in Meriam's collection clearly demonstrate. For example, Photograph 5-7 depicts upper grade girls sewing, while photograph 5-8 depicts boys working with woods and metal.



Photograph 5-7  
Meriam, Junius L., Papers, 1900-1944  
(C965\_5), Western Historical Manuscript  
Collection—Columbia, MO.  
Reprinted with permission.



Photograph 5-8  
 Meriam, Junius L., Papers, 1900-1944  
 (C965\_4), Western Historical Manuscript  
 Collection—Columbia, MO.  
 Reprinted with permission.

#### Subject Matter, Method, and Motive

Meriam (1920) included in his curriculum consideration of subject matter, motive, and method and their relationship with each other. Meriam (1920) summarized the relationship among the three with a basic principle: "The more normal the pupils' motives and the more appropriate the subject matter, the less is the need of method" (p. 437). If the motive, or mental attitude of the students toward the subjects of study, had to be artificially created, the subject matter was inappropriate. Meriam (1909) argued, instead, that real motives result from the study of real life. The traditional curriculum was a combination of subjects that had no discernible relationship with each other or the students. As a result, it provided little or none of the usual motivation found in the normal experiences of children

outside of school (Meriam, 1920). Because of the lack of inherent motivation, Meriam (1909) asserted that the curriculum had to consider the real, present needs of the students.

A letter from W. H. Kilpatrick to the president of the University of Missouri validated Meriam's explanation of subject matter, method, and motive and their relationship with each other. Kilpatrick was part of a group that visited University Elementary School in 1917. At the conclusion of the visit, Kilpatrick (1917) noted that the interest of every member of the group had been stimulated (personal correspondence, Meriam Papers). After "a good deal of discussion," the group agreed that Meriam's contribution was not with any method or principle of method, but with a new way of looking at the curriculum (W. Kilpatrick, April 26, 1917, personal correspondence, Meriam Papers). The teachers in the school "had come to feel a freedom and a correlative responsibility regarding the curriculum which called forth from them unusual professional zeal and the best though of which they were capable" (W. Kilpatrick, April 26, 1917, personal correspondence, Meriam Papers). The teachers' enthusiastic attitude, thought, and responsibility stimulated the students, which resulted in a similar interest and sense of responsibility (W. Kilpatrick, April 26, 1917, personal correspondence, Meriam Papers). Kilpatrick's observations

confirmed Meriam's contention that method did not have to be an issue if the students were interested in the subject matter.

In Meriam's (1920) curriculum, the subject matter utilized the motivation the students already had instead of trying to find motives that would lead students to study traditional subject matter. Meriam (1909) explained that in real life, the Three R's were tools for the work of a banker or laborer, but they were subordinate to real life activities. Meriam's (1909) curriculum placed emphasis on the experiences of life out of school, providing the natural motivation that ultimately led to greater mastery of the Three-R subjects. The subjects of the traditional curriculum were generalizations of adult experiences, and administrators, teachers, and parents forced them on students, claiming that these subjects would be of service to them later in life. Adults feared allowing school work to be comprised completely of children's normal interests and activities (Meriam, 1920). Meriam (1920), however, advocated that teachers, administrators, and parents recognize children's normal motives and embrace the selection of subject matter more appropriate to those motives.

#### Educational Outcomes

Meriam (1920) disliked the idea of measuring the abilities of the students at University Elementary School with the tests

for which students of the traditional school had been trained, claiming not only that the comparison was unfair, but that the tests were an ineffectual assessment of the work completed. Additionally, judging the effectiveness of University Elementary School by its students' ability to keep up with the traditional system of education—the system upon which Meriam was trying to improve—was of little value (Wells, 1921, "A School for Real Boys and Girls," 87-88). After all, Meriam's purpose was not to teach children more in the same amount of time or to prepare them more effectively for college. However, Meriam (1920) acknowledged that when students who attended University Elementary School and subsequently attended a traditional school or a school in which they had to compete with traditionally trained students, comparison of the two types of students provided a reliable method of evaluating the work of University Elementary School in terms of the traditional work. Meriam (1920) understood that students, parents, and communities demanded of University Elementary School that the students who wanted to transfer to the traditional school be able to do the work there without any problems, given time is to adjust to the new conditions.

Meriam asserted that students in University Elementary School read as much or more than students in Columbia's public elementary school (1914, "Come To Study School Method," Meriam

Papers, 34). He also claimed that his students were more advanced than public elementary school students in comprehending problems in the Three-R subjects and that they appreciated the real-life activities that gave rise to such problems (1911, "Natural Education," Meriam Papers, 74b). To substantiate his claims, Meriam (1920) provided data of students trained at University Elementary School who then attended other schools, but he qualified the data as "quite limited," explaining that the conclusions were not as reliable as they would be if he had more cases (p. 445). Between September 1912 and June 1916, after having spent at least one year at University Elementary School, twenty-seven students withdrew and enrolled in two city of Columbia schools.

Meriam's (1920) data revealed that in the subject of reading in the city schools, the students who had spent at least a year in University Elementary School earned the highest grade (E) at the rate of eleven percent and the second highest grade (S) at the rate of forty-eight, compared with the city school students, who earned E at the rate of six percent and S at the rate of 35 percent. In addition to the percentage of E's and S's being noticeably greater for the University Elementary Students, the percentage of low grades, I's and F's, was noticeably lower. Only in the subjects writing, spelling, and geography did the University Elementary School students earn a lower percentage of

E's that the city school students, but the overall percentage of E's and S's for these subjects was greater. Regarding I's and F's, the overall percentage in each of the nine school subjects was "strikingly less" for University Elementary School students than for students with traditional training. Students trained at University Elementary School rarely earned an F, while traditionally-trained students earned an F at the rate of one in twenty.

Meriam asserted that the purpose of elementary education was not to train students for high school but to help them do better in the normal activities in which they engage (1916, "Pupils Show Worth of Elementary Plan," Meriam Papers, 25). However, Meriam (1920) acknowledged that the changes in the elementary curriculum would never be accepted by students, teachers, administrators, parents, or the community unless students who attended University Elementary School subsequently experienced success in the traditional high school.

Meriam contended that University Elementary School students entering high school were better prepared and more capable than students with a traditional elementary education (Chenery, 1916, "Public Schools," Meriam Papers, 89). To verify his contention, Meriam (1920) studied data involving one hundred students who graduated from University Elementary School between 1907 and 1917 inclusive and entered one of two high schools, Columbia

City High School or University High School. Even though all graduates from the beginning through the class of 1917 were considered in the study, students who graduated in 1907 experienced only work in the upper grades since the school opened in 1905.

Rather than examining grades, Meriam advocated judging students by the part they took in community life and how helpful they were (1916, "Pupils Show Worth of Elementary Plan," Meriam Papers, 25). He also believed that independent, original thinking indicated a successful educational experience (1912, "Where School-Going Is Fun," Meriam Papers, 82). For the sake of his study, however, Meriam realized the necessity of using earned grades.

Meriam's (1920) study concluded that fifty-five University Elementary School students who attended Columbia City High School earned many high grades and comparatively few low grades. Additionally, students who attended University Elementary School earned better grades than students who had different previous training. The data for the forty-five students who attended University High School revealed comparable results. At University High School, a larger percentage of the grades were E's, and a lower percentage were I's and F's than in Columbia City High School. Meriam (1920) concluded that the students at University High School were "intellectually stronger" than the

students of Columbia City High School (p. 452). He explained that students at University High School were three or four years older and came to the school from all parts of the state. Additionally, they typically had higher motives for study. Consequently, graduates of University Elementary School probably met stronger competitors at University High School than those who attended Columbia City High School. Nonetheless, University Elementary School students maintained a higher rank in University High School than they did in Columbia City High School.

Meriam (1920) offered five reasons for the success of University Elementary School students in high school, despite the lack of "traditional drill in the grade school subjects" (p. 456). First, University Elementary School graduates obtained the habit of approaching school studies as personal problems: "how we help one another, the squirrel as our pet, the grocery story, the meat market, the means of transportation, the post office, the army and navy, the work of the physicians and the nurse" (Meriam, 1920, p. 457). These were the problems of real life and appealed to children and adults. Second, the students developed the "spirit of initiative"; rather than having formal lessons assigned to them, large problems were opened to them (Meriam, 1920, p. 457). While the teacher offered guidance, the students depended largely on their own resources. Students learned how to

utilize the library's books, newspapers, and magazines to find the information they needed to work on their problems (Chenery, 1916, "Public Schools," 89). Third, embracing the problem as personal and developing the spirit of initiative contributed to the method of study (Meriam, 1920). With no textbook to turn to, students had to make observations, collect information, make comparisons, and reach conclusions. As a result, students were rarely unoccupied; they were industrious and self-directed (Meriam, n.d., University Elementary School pamphlet, Meriam Papers). These habits carried over into high school work (Meriam, 1920). Fourth, students acquired the habit of persistence through the problems studied and the methods of study. Because University Elementary School followed no fixed schedule, students learned to work on a problem for an extensive amount of time. In Kilpatrick's (1917) observations upon his visit to University Elementary School, he confirmed Meriam's explanation, noting the students' self direction (personal correspondence, Meriam Papers). Frances Harden (1917) also referenced the students' self reliance, which gave them "power to do their own thinking and the opportunity for self expression" (personal correspondence, Meriam Papers). Finally, the students' work was unlimited (Meriam, 1920). Students usually left a piece of work with the desire to "return for

further study whenever opportunity invites" (Meriam, 1920, p. 458).

Reactions to Meriam's Work at University Elementary School

During Meriam's tenure at the University of Missouri, University Elementary School captured the attention of educators, parents, and the general public throughout the country. As a result, Meriam received and accepted invitations to speak before a range of audiences, including the National Education Association, school administrators, teachers' associations and institutes, various parent associations, and general audiences. Clearly, a variety people were interested in Meriam's work at University Elementary School. Most people considered his theory and practice an improvement over the traditional curriculum; however, some dissention appeared in reviews of his work.

One such dissenting review appeared in an editorial that ran in The National Tribune (1909), a Washington, D. C. newspaper (Meriam Papers, 15). The writer argued that children were allowed to do what they wanted to do, thereby educating themselves. The writer also asserted that Meriam refused to teach math, geography, grammar, and spelling as formal studies, choosing instead to sugar-coat all learning exercises as games. At this point in the discussion, the writer referred to Meriam

as a member of the class of fools, suggesting that the education Meriam provided was of little value in the children's future careers. Developing skills in math, spelling, speaking, and writing required hard work and discipline, even the shedding of tears. The hard work and discipline children learned in school then carried over into their adult lives. The implication in the editorial was that because children at University Elementary School enjoyed their school work, they were not working hard or learning discipline. Additionally, because the curriculum was selected in terms of the activities of real life, children were not developing skills in the Three-R subjects. Interestingly, the writer did not provide any sources for the information regarding Meriam's work, nor was there any indication that the he had ever visited University Elementary School.

People who did visit University Elementary School offered nothing but praise for the work being done in the school. One such visitor was Helen Montgomery, sent to Columbia by Chicago's Joint Committee on Education to visit the school and meet with Meriam (1917, "Praises Elementary School," Meriam Papers, 82). Following the visit, Montgomery commented on the soundness of Meriam's principles, which enhanced students' interest in school by allowing them to choose what problems they study. Another visitor was Hilda Hartle of Cambridge, England, who was touring the United States to study the American educational system

(n.d., "Miss Hartle Likes M. U. School," Meriam Papers, 84). Hartle was impressed with the development of independent study, commenting that she observed more independent study at University Elementary School than she had observed in any other school she had visited. More praise came from Mrs. Donald R. Morgan, who visited University Elementary School as a part of her tour of elementary schools in the South and East (n.d., "Praises Elementary School," Meriam Papers, 81). Morgan, who resigned her position as assistant manager of a museum in San Diego specifically to tour elementary schools, noted that Meriam's students developed self reliance and the qualities of democracy needed to equip them for citizenship.

During the annual National Education Association's conference held in Kansas City, University Elementary School received many visitors (n.d., "Had Extra Visitors Yesterday," Meriam Papers, 35). Upon her visit, Elizabeth Woodward, supervisor of the Brooklyn Free Kindergarten Society, was impressed with the natural relationships between the teachers and students. She also expressed appreciation of the children's poise and initiative in planning and playing their own games.

Personnel from large metropolitan schools in New York and Chicago regularly visited University Elementary School to glean useful ideas for their own schools (1914, "Come To Study School Method," Meriam Papers, 34). They were particularly impressed

with the freedom Meriam allowed his students to use their natural instincts, learning as they played. They were also impressed with the rapid development of the children, as well as their ability to perform well in higher level courses in high school. Abraham Flexner, assistant secretary of New York City's General Board of Education, visited Columbia because he had heard about Meriam's work and wanted to see the operation of University Elementary School (n.d., "Praises Elementary School," Meriam Papers, 82). After his visit, Flexner commented that traditional schools should try to emulate Meriam's practices.

Though David Snedden (1919) did not visit University Elementary School or offer commentary regarding the school, he read and commented on Meriam's manuscript detailing his theory and how he put it into practice at the school (personal correspondence, Meriam Papers). Snedden (1919) made the comments in a letter he wrote to Caspar Hodgson in which he recommended publishing the manuscript, which he believed would be a good book for elementary school teachers and teacher candidates. Snedden (1919) categorized Meriam's theory as the "Dewey-McMurry et al philosophy of education" and perceived its primary value to be in its concrete examples and illustrations, all of which were based on experiences at University Elementary School. Snedden (1919) recommended the book for teachers who needed guidance in breaking away from the traditional school. However,

he disagreed with the underlying philosophy of Meriam's book and any similar books. He also stated that because he was not ready to propose an alternative philosophy, he could not logically offer criticism.

Meriam obviously changed the original title of his manuscript to Child Life and the Curriculum before he published it, as Snedden (1919) commented on the wisdom of retaining the word democracy in the title. He understood that Meriam's theory initially grew from the desire for schools to be more democratic, but he did not think that premise was prevalent in the manuscript. Snedden (1919) also suggested adding to the title something that indicated the book considered only elementary education. While Snedden (1919) appreciated Meriam's work, he did not agree with his principles. However, he offered no direct criticism because he had not developed what he considered to be improvements over the prevailing practices.

The reaction in which Meriam was probably the most interested was that of John and Evelyn Dewey (1915) in Schools of To-morrow. The purpose of the book was to show how educational theories were applied and to discuss the direction that American education was taking. Dewey & Dewey (1915) titled the chapter about University Elementary School "Four Factors in Natural Growth," focusing on Meriam's four studies—play, stories, observation, and handwork. Dewey & Dewey (1915)

interpreted Meriam's basic principle to be that education should follow the child's natural development and devoted the bulk of the chapter to a description of Meriam's curriculum and methods. At the conclusion of the chapter, Dewey & Dewey (1915) provided information regarding the educational outcomes at University Elementary School, most of which were probably provided by Meriam. Dewey & Dewey (1915) indicated that most of the elementary school graduates went to University High School, where they had no problems completing the college preparatory work. As a matter of fact, their grades and the age at which they typically entered college suggested that their elementary education gave them advantages over the students who attended the public elementary school.

Meriam was also the director of University High School and had reorganized the high school English curriculum to be more aligned with the elementary curriculum (Dewey & Dewey, 1915). A study of graduates from university schools and from the town high school enrolled in college English courses indicated that students who did not receive traditional training in high school English outperformed students who were formally trained.

Dewey & Dewey (1915) point out that judging University Elementary School by the students' ability to keep up with the traditional system—the system Meriam was trying to improve—was of little value. After all, Meriam's purpose was not to teach

more in the same length of time or better prepare students for college. Rather, Meriam's purpose was to give the children an education that would make them "better, happier, and more efficient" people by showing them what they were capable of and how to use those capabilities "materially and socially" (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 58). According to Dewey & Dewey (1915), if University Elementary School could give students all they would have gained in a more traditional school while it was learning the best methods to do so, there was no loss. If they learned a manual skill or gained bodily strength, or if they experienced enjoyment in their daily tasks and the humanities, those gains could be seen or measured. The real test of University Elementary School's success or failure, which attempted to help society by helping the individual, was the lives of all its students.

#### Summary

Meriam (1920) perceived two basic problems with the traditional education system: its purpose and its curriculum. According to Meriam (1920), the purpose of traditional education was to prepare children to be more efficient in later life. This purpose clashed with Meriam's (1920) fundamental principle—helping children do better in the activities in which they normally engaged. Regarding the traditional curriculum, Meriam

(1920) perceived it to be aimless, lifeless, disconnected, and congested. Therefore, instead of using the Three-R subjects of the traditional curriculum, Meriam (1920) used the normal interests and activities of children and the study.

In constructing his curriculum, Meriam developed and utilized five principles. First, Meriam (1920) asserted that school activities should help children be more efficient as children first, only secondarily preparing them for the future. Second, Meriam (1920) contended that the curriculum should be selected from the real life activities and environments of people. Third, Meriam (1920) argued that the curriculum should be flexible enough to meet individual interests and abilities. Fourth, Meriam (1920) emphasized that the curriculum's organization should allow for rearrangement of the day and the students' work. Finally, Meriam (1920) averred that the curriculum should lead students to appreciate and engage in both work and leisure.

Meriam (1920) divided his curriculum, which applied his five principles, into four subjects: observation, play, stories, and handwork. Meriam (1920) included observation as school subject because it was an important factor in child development. He included play and handwork to enable students to do better in their normal activities. Meriam (1920) included stories as a way for children to spend their leisure time. Meriam (1920) believed

that the subjects of his curriculum provided children motive to study, negating the concern for methods that would pique children's interest in something for which they showed no concern.

Meriam (1920) conducted several studies to determine the success of University Elementary School. Using student grades as a measure, he discovered that University Elementary School students were more successful in a traditional school setting—both elementary and high schools—than were students who had attended Columbia's public elementary school. Additionally, Meriam discovered that students who graduated from university schools performed better in college English courses than students who graduated from Columbia High School (Dewey & Dewey, 1915). Meriam (1920) attributed his students' success to five factors: students approached school studies as personal problems, students learned to be self directed, students learned how to find information, students learned to be persistent, and students learned that problems had unlimited depth.

Meriam admitted that his curriculum had weaknesses and was "not a panacea for all the educational ills and evils" (n.d., "Parents Give Views of Children's Work," Meriam Papers, 26). However, Meriam contended that its strength lay in the attitude of each student, which created a positive atmosphere that

permeated the school. Meriam's challenge was to teach students to profit through their enjoyment of learning.

## CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS OF MERIAM'S WORK WITH RESPECT TO PREVAILING  
INTERPRETATIONS OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

Notwithstanding educational historians' oversight of Meriam, the theory he put into practice through his research and experimentation and the results he achieved have potential implications for prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education. In this chapter, Meriam's theory and practice will be analyzed with respect to prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education to reveal the extent to which they are consistent with those interpretations. Meriam's theory and practice will be analyzed with respect to the interpretations of Cremin (1961), Tanner & Tanner (1990), Zilversmit (1993), Kliebard (1995), Semel & Sadovnik (1999), and Ravitch (2000).

In constructing his curriculum, Meriam developed and utilized five principles. First, Meriam (1920) asserted that school activities should help children be more efficient as children first, only secondarily preparing them for the future. Second, Meriam (1920) contended that the curriculum should be selected from the real life activities and environments of people. Third, Meriam (1920) argued that the curriculum should

be flexible enough to meet individual interests and abilities. Fourth, Meriam (1920) emphasized that the curriculum's organization should allow for rearrangement of the day and the students' work. Finally, Meriam (1920) maintained that the curriculum should lead students to appreciate and engage in both work and leisure.

Meriam (1920) divided his curriculum, which applied his five principles, into four subjects: observation, play, stories, and handwork. Meriam (1920) included observation as school subject because it was an important factor in child development. He included play and handwork to enable students to do better in their normal activities. Meriam (1920) included stories as a way for children to spend their leisure time. Meriam (1920) believed that the subjects of his curriculum provided children motive to study, negating the concern for methods that would pique children's interest in something for which they showed no concern.

#### Analysis of Meriam's Work with Respect to Cremin's (1961)

##### Interpretation of Progressive Education

Cremin (1961) asserted that progressive education meant four things: broadening the program and purpose of the school to include concern for health, vocation, and the quality of family and community life; applying in the classroom the pedagogical

principles derived from new scientific research in psychology and the social sciences; tailoring instruction to the different kinds and classes of children who were attending school, and believing that everyone could share not only in the benefits of the new sciences but in the pursuit of the arts as well.

Meriam's curriculum principles and the four subjects of study to which he applied his principles indicate complete consistency with Cremin's characteristics. Meriam's assertions that school activities should help children be more efficient as children, that the curriculum should be selected from the real life activities and environments of people, and that the curriculum's organization should allow for rearrangement of the day and the students' work, revealed his concern with children's health, vocation, and family and community life. The subjects play and handwork, which Meriam described as the normal activities of children, revealed the same concern. Meriam included observation as a school subject because it was an important factor in child development, demonstrating his application of pedagogical principles derived from research in psychology. Meriam's argument that the curriculum should be flexible enough to meet individual interests and abilities expressed his concern for individualizing instruction. Finally, Meriam's contention that the curriculum should lead students to appreciate and engage in both work and leisure, as well as his inclusion of observation

and stories as subjects, confirmed his commitment to the belief that everyone could share not only in the benefits of the new sciences but in the pursuit of the arts as well.

Analysis of Meriam's Work with Respect to Tanner & Tanner's  
(1990) Interpretation of Progressive Education

Tanner & Tanner (1990) described the child-centered romanticists, who focused more on the needs of the child and less on the need for systematic curriculum development. Tanner & Tanner (1990) also described the reconstructionists, who wanted to use the school for direct social correction. Finally, Tanner & Tanner (1990) described the experimentalists who followed Dewey's beliefs and believed the democratic principle of mutual responsibility. For individuals to be able to contribute to the good of all, the school had to provide opportunity for a diversity of students to discover their abilities and develop them as much as possible. Equal opportunity meant a flexible curriculum adjusted to the needs of individuals that also strengthened the "ties which unite all citizens of a democracy" (Tanner & Tanner, 1990, p. 114). While Meriam was focused on the child, he did not forego systematic curriculum development in favor of the interests of the child. Nor did he see the school as the source of social change. Consequently, Meriam's theory does not show consistency with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) child-

centered romanticist or reconstructionist interpretation of progressive education. Instead, Meriam's theory was more aligned with Dewey's and therefore is consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the experimentalists. Meriam's idea of helping children to be more efficient as children first, selecting the curriculum from the real life activities and environments of people, and providing a flexible curriculum that met the interests and needs of children mirrored Dewey's embryonic society. As children participated together in activities in which they were interested, they formed a miniature community, learning the democratic concept of mutual responsibility. Though Meriam differed from Dewey in his direct concern for bringing about social reform, he argued that enabling children to be more efficient as children would enable them to be more efficient as adults. As a result, they would be able to contribute more to society. While Meriam's theory did not directly incorporate all of Dewey's beliefs, it is largely consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the experimentalist branch of progressive education.

Analysis of Meriam's Work with Respect to Zilversmit's  
(1993) Interpretation of Progressive Education

Zilversmit (1993) contended the existence of a central set of ideas and practices, which grew from the writings of Dewey.

The philosophical foundation of the progressive movement depended on Dewey's belief that all facets of life were continually changing. The ultimate task of education, then, was to prepare people for life and for change. Instead of preparing children for adulthood, however, schools should utilize children's natural curiosity rather than subordinating it to a pre-selected, though arbitrary, curriculum and future goals. Additionally, Dewey maintained that the school had to be the means of societal reform. Again, while Meriam's theory did not directly address social reform, it was, in most respects, aligned with Dewey's. Meriam's concept of helping children to be more efficient as children first was in accord with Dewey's idea that education should prepare children for life, not necessarily adulthood. Meriam's principle of selecting the curriculum from the real life activities and environments of people and providing a flexible curriculum that met the interests and needs of children echoed Dewey's belief that schools should utilize children's natural curiosity.

While he did not categorize the varying ideas stressed by different progressive theories, as did Tanner & Tanner, Zilversmit (1993) provided much the same descriptions. He described the child-centered progressives as those who agreed that the school should recognize the interests of the child, but that often resulted in the neglect of academics. While Meriam

subordinated the rank of academic subjects in his curriculum as being less significant than the activities of real life, he did not neglect traditional subject matter. Therefore, his theory is not consistent with Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of the child-centered progressives. Zilversmit (1993) also discussed progressive educators who adopted Dewey's wish for social reform through education, emphasizing the fact that some educators used the "language of progressive education" to justify procedures that were not in accord with Dewey's goals, leading to the appearance of anti-intellectualism (p. 13). Since Meriam did not incorporate social reform into his principles, his theory is not consistent with Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of progressive education as social reform.

Analysis of Meriam's Work with Respect to Kliebard's (1995)

#### Demarcation of Reform Groups

In his Preface to the first edition of The Struggle for the American Curriculum, Kliebard (1995) determined that he could identify and define nothing that deserved the single name progressive education, concluding that there were several reform movements in education during the twentieth century, and each had its own agenda. Kliebard (1995) decided instead to demarcate the foremost ideological positions of the different reform groups and explain how they both balanced and contradicted each

other. Ultimately, he settled on four groups: humanists, who stood in opposition to the other three groups; developmentalists; social efficiency educators; and social meliorists. The humanists were "the guardians of an ancient tradition tied to the power and reason and the finest elements of the Western cultural heritage" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 23). The developmentalists led the charge for a curriculum aligned with the natural development of the child, using scientific data to understand the different stages of child and adolescent development, as well as the nature of learning. Like Dewey's, Meriam's theory is consistent with Kliebard's interpretations of humanists and developmentalists. While Meriam did not guard the position traditional subjects had always held in the curriculum, he did preserve their inclusion. However, his focus on the interests, needs, and natural development of children makes his theory also consistent with Kliebard's interpretation of developmentalists. The social efficiency educators also believed in using scientific data, and they believed a scientifically-based curriculum could be more functional in the roles children took as adults (Kliebard, 1995). Though Meriam argued that enabling children to be more efficient as children would enable them to be more efficient as adults, his primary goal was not a more efficiently running society. The social meliorists perceived the school as the primary force for social change and

social justice (Kliebard, 1995). Meriam's theory is not consistent with Kliebard's interpretations of social efficiency educators or social meliorists.

Analysis of Meriam's Work with Respect to Semel & Sadovnik's  
(1999) Interpretation of Progressive Education

Semel & Sadovnik (1999) put Dewey at the forefront of movement in progressive education. According to Semel & Sadovnik (1999), Dewey based his methodology on the idea that children were "active, organic beings, growing and changing," so they needed a course of study that reflected their stage of development (p. 6). Dewey supported freedom and responsibility for students—essential factors in democratic living. He also believed that, to help students assume their eventual roles in society and live democratically, the school should reflect a democratic community. Basically, Semel & Sadovnik (1999) maintained, Dewey respected democracy and believed education contributed to a perfect realization of democracy through continual reconstruction and reorganization of society. Though Meriam's ultimate goal was not the realization of democracy through society reconstruction and reorganization, his theory was consistent in Dewey's in other respects. Meriam's principle of providing a flexible curriculum that met the interests and needs of children was in harmony with Dewey's belief that

children needed a course of study that reflected their stage of development. Meriam's principle of selecting the curriculum from the real life activities and environments helped children assume roles in the school community, resembling Dewey's embryonic community. Though Meriam did not focus on teaching children the democratic concept of mutual responsibility, their participation in the school community engendered in them the traits of loyalty and mutual respect.

Unfortunately, other progressive educators misinterpreted Dewey, leading to a variety of different theories of progressive education (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999). According to Semel & Sadovnik (1999), three progressive forms emerged: child-centered pedagogy, social efficiency pedagogy, and social reconstructionist pedagogy. The child-centered pedagogy argued that schools should develop curricula according to the stages of child development and suggested individualizing instruction and paying attention to the needs and interests of the children. Meriam's theory could be considered consistent with Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) child-centered pedagogy if one did not carefully consider his principles of curriculum selection that did not focus specifically on children's interests, such as the inclusion of the activities of real life as well as traditional subject matter. Again, while Meriam argued that helping children to be more efficient in their activities as children would

enable them to be more efficient in their adult activities, his theory is not consistent with Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of the social efficiency pedagogy, which encouraged schools not only to provide meaningful experiences for children but also to prepare them for the occupations they would assume as adults. Meriam, after all, was more concerned with helping them live as children than prepare for adulthood. The social reconstructionist pedagogy stressed the development of "a more just, humane and egalitarian community" (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 10). Meriam's principles did not consider social reform, so his theory is not consistent with Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of the social reconstructionist pedagogy.

#### Analysis of Meriam's Work with Respect to Ravitch's (2000)

##### Interpretation of Progressive Education

According to Ravitch (2000), Dewey's beliefs encompassed the primary themes of progressive education. Dewey maintained that advancing education meant applying the social sciences, especially psychology, to education. Meriam was also concerned with the application of psychology to education, specifically including observation as a subject in his curriculum because it was a factor in child development. The school had to represent real life, so the best way to correlate the Three-R subjects was

to focus on children's natural interests. Instead of selecting the curriculum from traditional academic subjects, Meriam selected his curriculum from the activities and environments of people and provided flexibility to allow for individual interests and abilities. However, he used real life activities to help children develop skills in the Three-R subjects. Meriam based his curriculum on Dewey's beliefs. According to Ravitch (2000), Dewey advised that what was taught in school should be determined by children's ability to understand it as it applied in real life. Meriam followed Dewey's advice, using real-life applications to teach the skills usually taught through isolated subjects in the traditional curriculum. For Dewey, the school was a mechanism of social change and progress, so the focus of education should be problems and processes instead of academic subjects. While Meriam's curriculum did focus on problems and processes, he did not necessarily perceive the school as a mechanism of social change.

Ravitch (2000) agreed with Semel & Sadovnik that while Dewey inspired the progressive education movement, progressive educators were not always loyal to his intentions. She maintained that the progressive movement included four ideas, all of which undermined the basic idea that children should study an academic curriculum. The first idea was the mental testing movement, which embraced the idea that education could

become a science, the methods and purpose of education being determined and measured scientifically. The second idea, the child-centered movement, suggested the nature and needs of the child could determine the methods and purpose of education. The third idea, the social efficiency movement, claimed that assessing society's needs and preparing children for their role in society could determine the methods and purpose of education. The fourth idea manifested itself in two versions; the first version held that the method and purpose of education could be altered in ways that would bring about social reform by "freeing children's creative spirit" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60). The second version maintained that the methods and purpose of education could be changed in ways to bring about social reform by "indoctrinating them for life in a planned society" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60). Again, Meriam's theory could be associated with Ravitch's interpretation of the child-centered movement because of his focus on the nature and needs of children. However, Meriam's focus on children did not obscure his understanding for the importance of academic skills; he simply used the natural activities of people to teach those skills so that children could see the relevance of what they were learning.

Analysis of Meriam's theory and practice with respect to the prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education highlights the major principles of

Meriam's theory and provides a basis for comparison of his theory and practice to other early twentieth century theories of progressive education. However, analysis of his theory and practice also informs and, in some cases, corrects the prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education.

Extent to Which Analysis of Meriam's Work Informs or Corrects  
Prevailing Interpretations of Early Twentieth Century  
Progressive Education

Analysis of Meriam's work at University Elementary School—his curriculum principles and the subjects to which he applied his principles—upholds Cremin's (1961) four characteristics of progressive education. It also lends credence to Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the experimentalist progressives, who followed Dewey's beliefs and believed the democratic principle of mutual responsibility . However, it offers little support for Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the child-centered romanticists, who focused more on the needs of the child and less on the need for systematic curriculum development, and no support for their interpretation of the reconstructionists, who wanted to use the school for direct social correction.

With the exception of Meriam's lack of concern for bringing about social reform, analysis of his work maintains Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of progressive education, which grew from the writings of Dewey. Like Tanner & Tanner, Zilversmit (1993) included interpretations of theories he considered offshoots of Dewey's theory, the child-centered progressives and the progressive educators who pushed primarily for social reform. Study of Meriam's work offers no support for the Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of the child-centered progressives, who neglected academics in their attempts to recognize the interest of the child, or the social reformists, who justified procedures that were not aligned with Dewey's goal in the pursuit of social reform. Consideration of Meriam's work offers support for Kliebard's (1995) interpretations of the humanists, who wanted to preserve the traditional curriculum, and the developmentalists, who wanted to align the curriculum with the natural development of the child. Meriam's work, however, offers no support for Kliebard's (1995) interpretations of the social efficiency educators, who believed a scientifically-based curriculum could be more functional in the roles children took as adults, or the social meliorists, who perceived the school as the primary source of social change.

Though Meriam's theory did not involve social reconstruction and reorganization, it was largely consistent

with Dewey's. Examination of Meriam's work, therefore, supports Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of progressive education, which put Dewey at the forefront of the progressive movement in education. Research of Meriam's work supports, to some extent, Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of child-centered pedagogy, which suggested individualizing instruction and paying attention to the needs and interests of the children. However, Meriam's curriculum included activities of real life and traditional subject matter and did not focus solely on the needs and interests of the children. Analysis of Meriam's work lends no credence to Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of social efficiency pedagogy, which encouraged schools to provide meaningful experiences for children and prepare them for the occupations they would assume as adults.

Ravitch (2000) maintained that Dewey's beliefs encompassed the primary themes of progressive education. However, Ravitch (2000) contended that not all progressive educators were loyal to Dewey's intentions, resulting in different strands of progressive education, all of which undermined the tenet that children should study an academic curriculum. These strands included the mental testing movement, the social efficiency movement, the child-centered movement, and the social reform movement. Ravitch (2000) argued that these strands of the progressive movement, which had the most influence on public

education, naturally resulted in "anti-intellectualism," and she used Meriam's school as one such example (p.16). However, consideration of Meriam's theory and practice does not support Ravitch's (2000) allegation that the child-centered strand of progressive education, which Meriam's theory supports to a limited degree, undermined the idea that children should study an academic curriculum. Ravitch (2000) claimed that in Meriam's school "adult purposes and subject matter virtually disappeared" (p. 91). However, Meriam's theory and practice differed from Dewey's only in that he did not perceive the school as a mechanism of social change. Like Dewey, Meriam included the Three-R subjects in his curriculum, but he used real-life applications to teach the skills usually taught through isolated subjects in the traditional curriculum, following Dewey's advice to determine what was taught in school by children's ability to understand it as it applied in real life. In Child Life and the Curriculum, Meriam (1920) stated, "Such details of arithmetic, language, and geography are properly concrete only when they function in the real experience of people, when that experience is of primary importance and these details of arithmetic, language, and geography are instruments in contributing to the effectiveness of that experience" (p. 172).

Ironically, Ravitch (2000) is the only educational historian who has devoted significant discussion to Meriam, and

she misinterpreted him. Certainly, Meriam did not advocate using traditional instructional methods to teach the academic curriculum; neither did he, however, resolutely spurn subject matter as Ravitch (2000) asserted. Ravitch's (2000) misinterpretation of Meriam's work leads one to question her generalization that all theories other than Dewey's undermined the basic idea that children should study and academic curriculum.

#### Summary

The differing interpretations of early twentieth century theories and progressive education mirrored the same lack of agreement that progressive educators demonstrated through development of their varied theories. Even though progressive educators of the early twentieth century espoused the same basic principles, varied interpretations of those basic principles grew into many different theories. While Dewey's theory can be interpreted as the definitive curriculum theory of progressive education, educational historians cannot contend that because an educator was a part of the progressive educational movement, he espoused the same ideas. However, Meriam's theory was based on Dewey's theory and emulated it in all aspects with the exception of Dewey's concern for social reform. Meriam's theory, which closely mirrored Dewey's definitive curriculum theory of

progressive education, is more consistent with Cremin's (1961), Tanner & Tanner's (1990), Zilversmit's (1993), Semel & Sadovnik's (1999), and Ravitch's (2000) interpretations of progressive education in general than are Kilpatrick's, Bobbitt's, and Charters'. However, Meriam's theory lacks consistency with Tanner & Tanner's (1990), Zilversmit (1993), Semel & Sadovnik's (1999), and Ravitch's (2000) interpretations of the branches of progressive education that grew from misinterpretation of Dewey's ideas. Viewed from a different perspective, analysis of Meriam's work supports Cremin's (1961), Tanner & Tanner's (1990), Zilversmit's (1993), and Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretations of progressive education in general. Analysis of Meriam's work, because of its parallel to Dewey's work, also supports Ravitch's (2000) interpretation of progressive education in general. Ravitch (2000), however, misconstrued Meriam's work, describing him as one of the progressive educators who misinterpreted Dewey's intentions by undermining the principle that children should study an academic curriculum. Despite its commonalities with Dewey's theory, however, Meriam's work has been virtually overlooked by these educational historians. Only in-depth study of the theory and practice of any progressive educator can expose significant information that has been overlooked in educational historians' interpretations of progressive education. The reconstruction of

Meriam's work at University Elementary School revealed significant similarities between his theory and practice and Dewey's. If Dewey's theory is considered the definitive curriculum theory of progressive education, the similarities between the work of Meriam and Dewey suggest a void in the prevailing interpretations of progressive education. In addition, the findings of this study suggest implications for current curriculum research and practice.

## CHAPTER 7

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite Meriam's (1872-1960) devotion of most of his professional life to the improvement of elementary education through his research and experimentation in instructional methods and curriculum, today's educational historians have virtually overlooked his work as a progressive educator. Though he criticized the traditional curriculum, Meriam also opposed progressive practices that advocated the abolishment of traditional subject matter. Instead, he encouraged using activities appropriate to children's interests to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. He organized his curriculum around children's experiences and integrated the traditional subject matter necessary to teach the concepts.

Reconstruction of Meriam's work at University Elementary School explicated his theory and practice and allowed the researcher to make comparisons with other early twentieth century progressive theories and practices, comparisons that revealed similarities and differences. The theory he put into practice through his research and experimentation and the results he achieved have definite implications for prevailing

interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education as well as for current curriculum practice.

#### Research Questions

1. What were the predominant theories of early twentieth century progressive education?

John Dewey's theory stood at the forefront of progressive education, and his philosophy formulated the basic tenets of progressivism. Dewey asserted that the needs and interests of the child in the classroom should be a priority for educators and that the child should participate in his or her course of study, albeit under the guidance of a teacher (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999). Dewey believed that school should mirror the life of society at large (Cremin, 1961). He perceived the need of education to increase the breadth of social situations in which individuals recognized concerns, made choices regarding those concerns, and acted upon their choices. Ultimately, Dewey sought to achieve intellectual development through the curriculum because it gave the individual control over his or her surroundings, which offered the most promise for a better society (Kliebard, 1995).

W. H. Kilpatrick's project method shared similarities with Dewey's theory in its concern for children. For Kilpatrick, the project method was not a way of reorganizing the teaching of

particular subjects; rather, it was a substitute for the subject (Kliebard, 1995). Kilpatrick asserted that the process of teaching activities rather than subjects should replace the subject-centered curriculum of secondary schools (Zilversmit, 1993). Because no necessary conflict existed between social demands and the child's interests, practicing well-chosen purposeful acts under the guidance of teachers, while being held accountable for their actions, would prepare students for "the worthy life of the coming day" (Kilpatrick, 1918, p. 323). Kilpatrick (1918) believed education should prepare students to meet the "demands for practical efficiency and of moral responsibility," thus presenting the "ideal of democratic citizenship" (p. 322).

Differing from Dewey and Kilpatrick, Bobbitt and Charters analyzed contemporary society as the standard of priority in the curriculum (Cremin, 1961). Bobbitt (1924) believed the purpose of education was to prepare learners for adulthood rather than childhood and youth. He asserted that learning what men and women "ought to do along the many lines and levels of human experience" would reveal "the things for which they should be trained" (Bobbitt, 1934, p. 8). To develop educational objectives, which comprised the content of the various subjects, he needed to discover "the activities which ought to make up the lives of men and women," along with the "abilities and personal

qualities necessary for proper performance" (Bobbitt, 1924, p. 8). In order to do so, he developed a plan called activity analysis. The method involved the analysis of the specific activities needed for the performance of a given job, the implication being that the schools could reduce the curriculum to twenty or thirty thousand mechanical skills or behaviors (Tanner & Tanner, 1991). Charters (1924) began his discussion of curriculum construction by explaining job analysis, the determination of "what activities are carried on by individuals in the performance of tasks" (p. 214). The curriculum maker developed a list of ideals and a list of activities related to the job in which the learner planned to work, in the present or in the future (Ravitch, 2000). Using these lists, the curriculum maker prepared units of study, ranked in order based on the learners' interests, their level of difficulty, and their function.

2. What are the prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education?

Cremin (1961) asserted that progressive education meant four things: broadening the program and purpose of the school to include concern for health, vocation, and the quality of family and community life; applying in the classroom the pedagogical principles derived from new scientific research in psychology

and the social sciences; tailoring instruction to the different kinds and classes of children who were attending school, and believing that everyone could share not only in the benefits of the new sciences but in the pursuit of the arts as well.

Progressive educators who developed theories of progressive education, however, did not all agree about the meaning of the movement, which gave rise to a number of different progressive theories.

Tanner & Tanner (1990) agreed with Cremin's (1961) contention that progressive education meant different things to different people. They described the child-centered romanticists, who focused more on the needs of the child and less on the need for systematic curriculum development. Tanner & Tanner (1990) also described the reconstructionists, who wanted to use the school for direct social correction. Finally, Tanner & Tanner (1990) described the experimentalists who followed Dewey's beliefs and believed the democratic principle of mutual responsibility.

Zilversmit (1993) contended the existence of a central set of ideas and practices, which grew from the writings of Dewey. While he did not categorize the varying ideas stressed by different progressive theories, as did Tanner & Tanner, Zilversmit (1993) provided much the same descriptions. He described the child-centered progressives as those who agreed

that the school should recognize the interests of the child, but that often resulted in the neglect of academics. Zilversmit (1993) also discussed progressive educators who adopted Dewey's wish for social reform through education, emphasizing the fact that some educators used the "language of progressive education" to justify procedures that were not in accord with Dewey's goals, leading to the appearance of anti-intellectualism (p. 13). Interestingly, while Zilversmit (1993) considered particular reforms to be a part of the overall Progressive movement, he did not consider them to be part of progressive education. In this group Zilversmit (1993) included reformers who called for a vocational component, reformers concerned with helping European immigrants assimilate, and reformers concerned with "applying principles of efficiency, centralization, and bureaucratic decision making, based on the example of modern business, to the schools" (p. 2).

In his Preface to the first edition of The Struggle for the American Curriculum, Kliebard (1995) determined that he could identify and define nothing that deserved the single name progressive education, concluding that there were several reform movements in education during the twentieth century, and each had its own agenda. Kliebard (1995) decided instead to demarcate the foremost ideological positions of the different reform groups and explain how they both balanced and contradicted each

other. Ultimately, he settled on four groups: humanists, who stood in opposition to the other three groups; developmentalists; social efficiency educators; and social meliorists. The humanists were "the guardians of an ancient tradition tied to the power and reason and the finest elements of the Western cultural heritage" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 23). The developmentalists led the charge for a curriculum aligned with the natural development of the child, using scientific data to understand the different stages of child and adolescent development, as well as the nature of learning. The social efficiency educators also believed in using scientific data, and they believed a scientifically-based curriculum could be more functional in the roles children took as adults. The social meliorists perceived the school as the primary force for social change and social justice.

Semel & Sadovnik (1999) put Dewey at the forefront of movement in progressive education. Unfortunately, other progressive educators misinterpreted Dewey, leading to a variety of different theories of progressive education. According to Semel & Sadovnik (1999), three progressive forms emerged: child-centered pedagogy, social efficiency pedagogy, and social reconstructionist pedagogy. The child-centered pedagogy argued that schools should develop curricula according to the stages of child development and suggested individualizing instruction and

paying attention to the needs and interests of the children. The social efficiency pedagogy encouraged schools not only to provide meaningful experiences for children but also to prepare them for the occupations they would assume as adults. The social reconstructionist pedagogy stressed the development of "a more just, humane and egalitarian community" (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 10).

According to Ravitch (2000), Dewey's beliefs encompassed the primary themes of progressive education. However, Ravitch (2000) agreed with Semel & Sadovnik that while Dewey inspired the progressive education movement, progressive educators were not always loyal to his intentions. She maintained that the progressive movement included four ideas, all of which undermined the basic idea that children should study an academic curriculum. The first idea was the mental testing movement, which embraced the idea that education could become a science, the methods and purpose of education being determined and measured scientifically. The second idea, the child-centered movement, suggested the nature and needs of the child could determine the methods and purpose of education. The third idea, the social efficiency movement, claimed that assessing society's needs and preparing children for their role in society could determine the methods and purpose of education. The fourth idea manifested itself in two versions; the first version held that

the method and purpose of education could be altered in ways that would bring about social reform by "freeing children's creative spirit" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60). The second version maintained that the methods and purpose of education could be changed in ways to bring about social reform by "indoctrinating them for life in a planned society" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60).

3. What was Meriam's theory regarding instructional methods and curriculum?

Meriam's work, critical of traditional education, developed his major theory: school officials, teachers, and parents needed to appreciate and utilize children's natures in their normal out-of-school activities. To that end, Meriam (1909) provided a four-part principle to guide the selection and organization of the curriculum's content: the content of the curriculum should meet the real needs of the student, supply a conscious motive, demonstrate an understandable significance, and contribute to the continuity in the development of the study of a problem. Meriam (1909) implemented at University Elementary School a curriculum that manifested this principle; his curriculum began with the question "What are the normal activities of children of school age, in which the school can assist?" (p. 395). According to Meriam (1909), these activities were observation, play, stories, and handwork. Meriam (1910) believed that class study

should prepare students "to face the problem, to see the method of attack; then leave to the pupil the completion of the study at home" (p. 351). Aligned with the same idea, Meriam (1917a) argued that assessment should be in terms of normal experiences rather than formal exercises. It is important to note that while Meriam (1959a) was critical of the traditional curriculum, he never advocated omitting the Three-R subjects. He was also critical of parents and teachers who failed to provide learning opportunities in terms of children's nature and needs (Meriam, 1928). Ultimately, Meriam (1960) developed an emerging philosophy, in which he perceived four characteristics of the traditional and the modern school that demonstrated the change in values from the former to the latter. The characteristics included less emphasis on preparation for the future and more on present living, the continuation of the Three-R subject matter with more real life application, students learning through doing, and self-direction. Meriam (1959a) believed school should be a mutual affair—the teacher was not the only one teaching and the student was not the only one learning. Just as children in their "out-of-school" lives became leaders among their friends, Meriam (1959a) believed they also did so in school because they were experiencing "normal and wholesome life," learning as they needed (p. 282).

4. How did Meriam put his theory into practice at University Elementary School?

Meriam (1920) perceived two basic problems with the traditional education system: its purpose and its curriculum. According to Meriam (1920), the purpose of traditional education was to prepare children to be more efficient in later life. This purpose clashed with Meriam's (1920) fundamental principle—helping children do better in the activities in which they normally engaged. Regarding the traditional curriculum, Meriam (1920) perceived it to be aimless, lifeless, disconnected, and congested. Therefore, instead of using the Three-R subjects of the traditional curriculum, Meriam (1920) used the normal interests and activities of children and the study.

In constructing his curriculum, Meriam developed and utilized five principles. First, Meriam (1920) asserted that school activities should help children be more efficient as children first, only secondarily preparing them for the future. Second, Meriam (1920) contended that the curriculum should be selected from the real life activities and environments of people. Third, Meriam (1920) argued that the curriculum should be flexible enough to meet individual interests and abilities. Fourth, Meriam (1920) emphasized that the curriculum's organization should allow for rearrangement of the day and the students' work. Finally, Meriam (1920) maintained that the

curriculum should lead students to appreciate and engage in both work and leisure.

Meriam (1920) divided his curriculum, which applied his five principles, into four subjects: observation, play, stories, and handwork. Meriam (1920) included observation as school subject because it was an important factor in child development. He included play and handwork to enable students to do better in their normal activities. Meriam (1920) included stories as a way for children to spend their leisure time. Meriam (1920) believed that the subjects of his curriculum provided children motive to study, negating the concern for methods that would pique children's interest in something for which they showed no concern.

5. What were the results of Meriam's experimentation at University Elementary School?

Meriam (1920) conducted several studies to determine the success of University Elementary School. Using student grades as a measure, he discovered that University Elementary School students were more successful in a traditional school setting—both elementary and high schools—than were students who had attended Columbia's public elementary school. Additionally, Meriam discovered that students who graduated from university schools performed better in college English courses than

students who graduated from Columbia High School (Dewey & Dewey, 1915). Meriam (1920) attributed his students' success to five factors: students approached school studies as personal problems, students learned to be self directed, students learned how to find information, students learned to be persistent, and students learned that problems had unlimited depth.

6. To what extent does Meriam's work support prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education?

Meriam's (1920) curriculum utilized five principles: school activities should help children be more efficient as children first, only secondarily preparing them for the future; the curriculum should be selected from the real life activities and environments of people; the curriculum should be flexible enough to meet individual interests and abilities; the curriculum's organization should allow for rearrangement of the day and the students' work; and the curriculum should lead students to appreciate and engage in both work and leisure.

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their normal activities. Meriam (1920) included stories as a way for children to spend their leisure time. Meriam (1920) believed that the subjects of his curriculum provided children motive to study, negating the concern for methods that would pique children's interest in something for which they showed no concern.

Cremin (1961) asserted that progressive education meant four things: broadening the program and purpose of the school to include concern for health, vocation, and the quality of family and community life; applying in the classroom the pedagogical principles derived from new scientific research in psychology and the social sciences; tailoring instruction to the different kinds and classes of children who were attending school, and believing that everyone could share not only in the benefits of the new sciences but in the pursuit of the arts as well.

Meriam's curriculum principles and the four subjects of study to which he applied his principles indicate complete consistency with Cremin's characteristics. Meriam's assertions that school activities should help children be more efficient as children, that the curriculum should be selected from the real life activities and environments of people, and that the curriculum's organization should allow for rearrangement of the day and the students' work, revealed his concern with children's health, vocation, and family and community life. The subjects play and

handwork, which Meriam described as the normal activities of children, revealed the same concern. Meriam included observation as a school subject because it was an important factor in child development, demonstrating his application of pedagogical principles derived from research in psychology. Meriam's argument that the curriculum should be flexible enough to meet individual interests and abilities expressed his concern for individualizing instruction. Finally, Meriam's contention that the curriculum should lead students to appreciate and engage in both work and leisure, as well as his inclusion of observation and stories as subjects, confirmed his commitment to the belief that everyone could share not only in the benefits of the new sciences but in the pursuit of the arts as well.

Tanner & Tanner (1990) described the experimentalists who followed Dewey's beliefs and believed the democratic principle of mutual responsibility. For individuals to be able to contribute to the good of all, the school had to provide opportunity for a diversity of students to discover their abilities and develop them as much as possible. Equal opportunity meant a flexible curriculum adjusted to the needs of individuals that also strengthened the "ties which unite all citizens of a democracy" (Tanner & Tanner, 1990, p. 114). Meriam's theory was aligned with Dewey's and therefore is consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the

experimentalists. Meriam's idea of helping children to be more efficient as children first, selecting the curriculum from the real life activities and environments of people, and providing a flexible curriculum that met the interests and needs of children mirrored Dewey's embryonic society. As children participated together in activities in which they were interested, they formed a miniature community, learning the democratic concept of mutual responsibility. Though Meriam differed from Dewey in his direct concern for bringing about social reform, he argued that enabling children to be more efficient as children would enable them to be more efficient as adults. As a result, they would be able to contribute more to society. While Meriam's theory did not directly incorporate all of Dewey's beliefs, it is largely consistent with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the experimentalist branch of progressive education.

Zilversmit (1993) contended the existence of a central set of ideas and practices, which grew from the writings of Dewey. The philosophical foundation of the progressive movement depended on Dewey's belief that all facets of life were continually changing. The ultimate task of education, then, was to prepare people for life and for change. Instead of preparing children for adulthood, however, schools should utilize children's natural curiosity rather than subordinating it to a pre-selected, though arbitrary, curriculum and future goals.

Additionally, Dewey maintained that the school had to be the means of societal reform. Again, while Meriam's theory did not directly address social reform, it was, in most respects, aligned with Dewey's. Meriam's concept of helping children to be more efficient as children first was in accord with Dewey's idea that education should prepare children for life, not necessarily adulthood. Meriam's principle of selecting the curriculum from the real life activities and environments of people and providing a flexible curriculum that met the interests and needs of children echoed Dewey's belief that schools should utilize children's natural curiosity.

In his Preface to the first edition of The Struggle for the American Curriculum, Kliebard (1995) determined that he could identify and define nothing that deserved the single name progressive education, concluding that there were several reform movements in education during the twentieth century, and each had its own agenda. Kliebard (1995) decided instead to demarcate the foremost ideological positions of the different reform groups and explain how they both balanced and contradicted each other. The humanists were "the guardians of an ancient tradition tied to the power and reason and the finest elements of the Western cultural heritage" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 23). The developmentalists led the charge for a curriculum aligned with the natural development of the child, using scientific data to

understand the different stages of child and adolescent development, as well as the nature of learning. Like Dewey's, Meriam's theory is consistent with Kliebard's interpretations of humanists and developmentalists. While Meriam did not guard the position traditional subjects had always held in the curriculum, he did preserve their inclusion. However, his focus on the interests, needs, and natural development of children makes his theory also consistent with Kliebard's interpretation of developmentalists.

Semel & Sadovnik (1999) put Dewey at the forefront of movement in progressive education. According to Semel & Sadovnik (1999), Dewey based his methodology on the idea that children were "active, organic beings, growing and changing," so they needed a course of study that reflected their stage of development (p. 6). Dewey supported freedom and responsibility for students—essential factors in democratic living. He also believed that, to help students assume their eventual roles in society and live democratically, the school should reflect a democratic community. Basically, Semel & Sadovnik (1999) maintained, Dewey respected democracy and believed education contributed to a perfect realization of democracy through continual reconstruction and reorganization of society. Though Meriam's ultimate goal was not the realization of democracy through society reconstruction and reorganization, his theory

was consistent with Dewey's in other respects. Meriam's principle of providing a flexible curriculum that met the interests and needs of children was in harmony with Dewey's belief that children needed a course of study that reflected their stage of development. Meriam's principle of selecting the curriculum from the real life activities and environments helped children assume roles in the school community, resembling Dewey's embryonic community. Though Meriam did not focus on teaching children the democratic concept of mutual responsibility, their participation in the school community engendered in them the traits of loyalty and mutual respect.

According to Ravitch (2000), Dewey's beliefs encompassed the primary themes of progressive education. Dewey maintained that advancing education meant applying the social sciences, especially psychology, to education. Meriam was also concerned with the application of psychology to education, specifically including observation as a subject in his curriculum because it was a factor in child development. The school had to represent real life, so the best way to correlate the Three-R subjects was to focus on children's natural interests. Instead of selecting the curriculum from traditional academic subjects, Meriam selected his curriculum from the activities and environments of people and provided flexibility to allow for individual interests and abilities. However, he used real life activities

to help children develop skills in the Three-R subjects. Meriam's curriculum was based on the same beliefs on which Dewey based his. According to Ravitch (2000), Dewey advised that what was taught in school should be determined by children's ability to understand it as it applied in real life. Meriam followed Dewey's advice, using real-life applications to teach the skills usually taught through isolated subjects in the traditional curriculum. For Dewey, the school was a mechanism of social change and progress, so the focus of education should be problems and processes instead of academic subjects. While Meriam's curriculum did focus on problems and processes, he did not necessarily perceive the school as a mechanism of social change.

Analysis of Meriam's theory and practice also informs the prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education. For example, analysis of his curriculum principles and the subjects to which he applied his principles upholds Cremin's (1961) four characteristics of progressive education. It also lends credence to Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the experimentalist progressives, who followed Dewey's beliefs and believed the democratic principle of mutual responsibility. With the exception of Meriam's lack of concern for bringing about social reform, analysis of his work maintains Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of progressive education,

which grew from the writings of Dewey. Consideration of Meriam's work also offers support for Kliebard's (1995) interpretations of the humanists, who wanted to preserve the traditional curriculum, and the developmentalists, who wanted to align the curriculum with the natural development of the child.

Examination of Meriam's work supports Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of progressive education, which put Dewey at the forefront of the progressive movement in education. Research of Meriam's work supports, to some extent, Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of child-centered pedagogy, which suggested individualizing instruction and paying attention to the needs and interests of the children. However, Meriam's curriculum included activities of real life and traditional subject matter and did not focus solely on the needs and interests of the children.

Ravitch (2000) maintained that Dewey's beliefs encompassed the primary themes of progressive education. Like Dewey, Meriam included the Three-R subjects in his curriculum, but he used real-life applications to teach the skills usually taught through isolated subjects in the traditional curriculum, following Dewey's advice to determine what was taught in school by children's ability to understand it as it applied in real life. In Child Life and the Curriculum, Meriam (1920) stated, "Such details of arithmetic, language, and geography are

properly concrete only when they function in the real experience of people, when that experience is of primary importance and these details of arithmetic, language, and geography are instruments in contributing to the effectiveness of that experience" (p. 172). Consequently, if one considers only Ravitch's (2000) interpretation of the primary themes of progressive education, which was based on Dewey's beliefs, analysis of Meriam's work supports her interpretation.

7. To what extent does Meriam's work contradict prevailing interpretations of early twentieth century progressive education?

Tanner & Tanner (1990) described the child-centered romanticists, who focused more on the needs of the child and less on the need for systematic curriculum development (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). Tanner & Tanner (1990) also described the reconstructionists, who wanted to use the school for direct social correction. While Meriam was focused on the child, he did not forego systematic curriculum development in favor of the interests of the child. Nor did he see the school as the source of social change. Consequently, Meriam's theory does not show consistency with Tanner & Tanner's (1990) child-center romanticist or reconstructionist interpretation of progressive education.

While he did not categorize the varying ideas stressed by different progressive theories, as did Tanner & Tanner, Zilversmit (1993) provided much the same descriptions. He described the child-centered progressives as those who agreed that the school should recognize the interests of the child, but that often resulted in the neglect of academics. While Meriam subordinated the rank of academic subjects in his curriculum as being less significant than the activities of real life, he did not neglect traditional subject matter. Therefore, his theory is not consistent with Zilversmit's interpretation of the child-centered progressives. Zilversmit (1993) also discussed progressive educators who adopted Dewey's wish for social reform through education, emphasizing the fact that some educators used the "language of progressive education" to justify procedures that were not in accord with Dewey's goals, leading to the appearance of anti-intellectualism (p. 13). Since Meriam did not incorporate social reform into his principles, his theory is not consistent with Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of progressive education as social reform.

In his Preface to the first edition of The Struggle for the American Curriculum, Kliebard (1995) determined that he could identify and define nothing that deserved the single name progressive education, concluding that there were several reform movements in education during the twentieth century, and each

had its own agenda. Kliebard (1995) decided instead to demarcate the foremost ideological positions of the different reform groups and explain how they both balanced and contradicted each other. The social efficiency educators believed in using scientific data, and they believed a scientifically-based curriculum could be more functional in the roles children took as adults. Though Meriam argued that enabling children to be more efficient as children would enable them to be more efficient as adults, his primary goal was not a more efficiently running society. The social meliorists perceived the school as the primary force for social change and social justice. Meriam's theory is not consistent with Kliebard's interpretations of social efficiency educators or social meliorists.

According to Semel & Sadovnik (1999), three progressive forms emerged from the misinterpretations of Dewey's theory: child-centered pedagogy, social efficiency pedagogy, and social reconstructionist pedagogy. The child-centered pedagogy argued that schools should develop curricula according to the stages of child development and suggested individualizing instruction and paying attention to the needs and interests of the children. Meriam's theory could be considered consistent with Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) child-centered pedagogy if one did not carefully consider his principles of curriculum selection that did not focus specifically on children's interests, such as the

inclusion of the activities of real life as well as traditional subject matter. Again, while Meriam argued that helping children to be more efficient in their activities as children would enable them to be more efficient in their adult activities, his theory is not consistent with Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of the social efficiency pedagogy, which encouraged schools not only to provide meaningful experiences for children but also to prepare them for the occupations they would assume as adults. Meriam, after all, was more concerned with helping them live as children than prepare for adulthood. The social reconstructionist pedagogy stressed the development of "a more just, humane and egalitarian community" (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999, p. 10). Meriam's principles did not consider social reform, so his theory is not consistent with Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of the social reconstructionist pedagogy.

Ravitch (2000) agreed with Semel & Sadovnik that while Dewey inspired the progressive education movement, progressive educators were not always loyal to his intentions. She maintained that the progressive movement included four ideas, all of which undermined the basic idea that children should study an academic curriculum. The first idea was the mental testing movement, which embraced the idea that education could become a science, the methods and purpose of education being

determined and measured scientifically. The second idea, the child-centered movement, suggested the nature and needs of the child could determine the methods and purpose of education. The third idea, the social efficiency movement, claimed that assessing society's needs and preparing children for their role in society could determine the methods and purpose of education. The fourth idea manifested itself in two versions; the first version held that the method and purpose of education could be altered in ways that would bring about social reform by "freeing children's creative spirit" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60). The second version maintained that the methods and purpose of education could be changed in ways to bring about social reform by "indoctrinating them for life in a planned society" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 60). Again, Meriam's theory could be associated with Ravitch's interpretation of the child-centered movement because of his focus on the nature and needs of children. However, Meriam's focus on children did not obscure his understanding for the importance of academic skills; he simply used the natural activities of people to teach those skills so that children could see the relevance of what they were learning.

Analysis of Meriam's work refutes some interpretations of progressive education. For example, it offers little support for Tanner & Tanner's (1990) interpretation of the child-centered romanticists, who focused more on the needs of the child and

less on the need for systematic curriculum development, and no support for their interpretation of the reconstructionists, who wanted to use the school for direct social correction.

Zilversmit (1993) explained interpretations of theories he considered offshoots of Dewey's theory, the child-centered progressives and the progressive educators who pushed primarily for social reform. Study of Meriam's work offers no support for the Zilversmit's (1993) interpretation of the child-centered progressives, who neglected academics in their attempts to recognize the interest of the child, or the social reformists, who justified procedures that were not aligned with Dewey's goal in the pursuit of social reform.

Neither does Meriam's work offer support for Kliebard's (1995) interpretations of the social efficiency educators, who believed a scientifically-based curriculum could be more functional in the roles children took as adults, or the social meliorists, who perceived the school as the primary source of social change. Research of Meriam's work supports, to some extent, Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of child-centered pedagogy, which suggested individualizing instruction and paying attention to the needs and interests of the children. However, Meriam's curriculum included activities of real life and traditional subject matter and did not focus solely on the needs and interests of the children. Analysis of Meriam's work

lends no credence to Semel & Sadovnik's (1999) interpretation of social efficiency pedagogy, which encouraged schools to provide meaningful experiences for children and prepare them for the occupations they would assume as adults.

Ravitch (2000) maintained that Dewey's beliefs encompassed the primary themes of progressive education. However, Ravitch (2000) contended that not all progressive educators were loyal to Dewey's intentions, resulting in different strands of progressive education, all of which undermined the tenet that children should study an academic curriculum. Ravitch (2000) argued that the resulting strands of the progressive movement, which had the most influence on public education, naturally resulted in "anti-intellectualism," and she used Meriam's school as one such example (p.16). However, consideration of Meriam's theory and practice does not support Ravitch's (2000) allegation that the child-centered strand of progressive education, which Meriam's theory supports to a limited degree, undermined the idea that children should study an academic curriculum. Ravitch (2000) claimed that in Meriam's school "adult purposes and subject matter virtually disappeared" (p. 91). However, Meriam's theory and practice differed from Dewey's only in that he did not perceive the school as a mechanism of social change. Ironically, Ravitch (2000) is the only educational historian who has devoted significant discussion to Meriam, and she

misinterpreted him. Certainly, Meriam did not advocate using traditional instructional methods to teach the academic curriculum; neither did he, however, resolutely spurn subject matter as Ravitch (2000) asserted. Ravitch's (2000) misinterpretation of Meriam's work leads one to question her generalization that all theories other than Dewey's undermined the basic idea that children should study and academic curriculum.

8. What are the implications of Meriam's work for curriculum practice today?

#### Implications for Practice

In 1957, when Russia beat the United States in the space race by launching Sputnik, the first artificial earth satellite, American schools received the blame, giving rise to a "back-to-basics" reform movement that emphasized science and math. In 1983, American schools again came under attack when A Nation at Risk blamed the schools for America's decline in the global marketplace. Once more, the "back-to-basics" reform movement gained impetus and continues to impact educational policy today. Certainly, the state of Georgia has not escaped the prevailing reform movements of the past two decades. Shortly after publication of A Nation at Risk, Georgia's legislators passed the Quality Basic Education Act (1986). More recently, Roy

Barnes, a former governor, succeeded in pushing House Bill 1187-A Plus Education Reform Act (2000) through legislation. The most recent legislation is No Child Left Behind (2002), the overall purpose of which is to ensure that each child in America is able to meet the high learning standards of the state where he or she lives. The legislation requires each state to define minimum its standards and provides a timeline for determining whether a school, district, and the state are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward the goal of 100 percent of students meeting those standards by 2014. The legislation also mandates that all children will graduate from high school, though it provides no deadline.

The implementation of one reform after another indicates a continued dissatisfaction with the educational system, yet each "new" reform encourages a "back-to-basics" movement. "Back to basics" does not really imply basics, however; basics actually implies more higher level courses in science, math, and foreign language, courses geared toward the college preparatory diploma. Because schools often do not have enough personnel to offer academic courses specifically designed for technical-career students, those students often have to take the science, math, social studies, and English classes intended for college-bound students.

Even though the number of students attending college continues to increase, there is a large number of students who do not go to college, and the number of students who actually finish college is much smaller than the number of students who start. Even though many schools offer programs that provide students with vocational skills, those programs do not include academic courses designed to meet the needs of students who do not plan to attend college. Nor do schools find significance in teaching basic life skills to students who plan to attend college. For some reason, schools do not see any relevance in helping college-bound students develop skills in writing resumes, completing job applications, or writing business letters; interviewing for jobs; and following directions. Regardless of future plans, however, all students need to develop these skills.

Meriam implemented his curriculum in an elementary school during a time when students were not expected to pursue a high school diploma, much less a college degree. At a minimum, society now holds the expectation that students will graduate from high school, so high school graduates now correlate with elementary school graduates then. While Meriam's curriculum was an elementary curriculum, there is a correlation between the expectations of elementary school graduates then and high graduates of today. Though his actual curriculum would be far

too basic for high school students, his principles could be applied to a curriculum for high school students. With the flexibility of a curriculum that allows students to pursue the topics of study in which they are interested, division between the college-prep and career-technical programs of study might not be necessary because students could gain skills that would allow them to pursue postsecondary education, technical school or college, or to enter the world of work.

The true irony in continuing to force technical-career students into academic courses intended to prepare students for college occurs when students are not successful. Their lack of success often stems from lack of interest; if they do not plan to attend college, or do not really know what they want to do when they graduate from high school, they see no relevance in the course. Even students who plan to attend college ask the same question repeatedly: Why do we have to know this? If students who know they want to go to college cannot see the relevance, students who are unsure of their futures are less likely to. Schools, however, interpret failure as an indication of the students' intellectual abilities—or lack thereof—and try to remediate the students, approaching the same curriculum in a different way. Instead of changing the curriculum to meet the needs of the students, as Meriam did, they try to force the curriculum on the students. If schools provided opportunities

for students to learn by selecting the curriculum from the activities and environment of real life, students would be able to determine where their interests and abilities lie and pursue an education based on their interests and abilities.

The application of Meriam's theories to a high school curriculum could prevent failure that results from a lack of interest. If the curriculum has the flexibility to adapt to individual differences in interests and abilities and focus more on what the student needs now, the likelihood of apathy virtually disappears. Additionally, Meriam's curriculum was selected from real life and expressed in terms of the activities and environments of people. With more opportunities to discover their interests and talents and develop them more fully, both college-preparatory students and technical-career students could benefit from such a curriculum. Students could live more fully while they are in school as well as when they graduate and continue their education or enter the work force.

A major problem with Meriam's curriculum lies in the fact that he did not practice any kind of formal assessment. As long as today's society insists on empirical data, schools will continue testing students. These tests determine if students will be promoted in elementary school and if they will graduate from high school. Even if schools use Meriam's informal assessment methods, government legislation will mandate the

additional use of formal assessments. Of course, if today's schools could achieve the success that Meriam achieved at University Elementary School, students would probably achieve more success with the formal assessments than students who have been traditionally taught currently achieve.

Another quandary lies in the problems that might arise because of the necessary organizational structure of a school that implements a curriculum based on Meriam's principles. Meriam himself admitted that many changes had to occur in a school that implemented a curriculum such as his. Unfortunately, there is little likelihood that public schools today, being bound by so many legalities, could make the necessary changes. However, legislation does provide for charter schools, which can operate outside the normal guidelines to which other public schools have to adhere. A charter school would be the perfect choice to implement such a curriculum and document the results.

#### Implications for Research

Today's society bears striking resemblance to the society in which Meriam lived. Rapid advances in technology, changing life styles, a large number of immigrants—the issues America faced at the outset of the twentieth century differ little from the issue America faces today. It is no surprise that educators now, in the early twenty-first century, face the same issues

faced by educators of the early twentieth century. Not surprisingly, most issues point to one major factor: the curriculum and the considerations upon which the curriculum is determined. The age-old question persists: Should the curriculum consider the nature and needs of the learner, the nature of society, or the nature of the subject matter? Meriam's curriculum primarily supported consideration of the nature and needs of the learner, but he did not neglect society or subject matter in his curriculum. Even though a century has gone by since the opening of Meriam's University Elementary School, Meriam's theory and practice hold important implications for today's curriculum research.

George Santayana (1905), an American philosopher, poet, and novelist once remarked that those who could not remember the past were destined to repeat it. In their attempts to reform education, however, curriculum developers often fail to research successes and failures of past attempts at curriculum reform. The fact that Meriam's work has been virtually overlooked provides an excellent example of the failure to research an apparently successful progressive curriculum implemented in the past.

If Meriam's work has been disregarded, one can logically question whether there are other progressive educators who have also been overlooked. The number of visitors to University

Elementary School and the number of invitations Meriam received to speak and lecture are indicative of his renown in the education field, yet one can find little explication of his work by educational historians. It is possible, then, that other people have done similar work and had reputations as innovative educators, but their work has been ignored in curriculum research. The curriculum field needs research to identify other progressive educators—and their theories and practices—to analyze how their work might impact prevailing interpretations of progressive education as well as current curriculum practice.

Meriam's theory and practice were based on Dewey's ideals, but one cannot reach conclusions based on that information alone. A reconstruction of his work at University Elementary school revealed the principles behind his theory and how he implemented his curriculum. Meriam provided representative curriculum outlines, daily schedules, teaching methods, activities, games, types of reading and titles of stories or books targeted at different grade levels, records of books students read, pictures of student work, and results of a study he conducted involving University Elementary School graduates. Meriam gave educators not only a theory but also suggestions for how to put his theory into practice.

Though this study researched the work Meriam's work at University Elementary School, his work did not end there. As

Professor of Education at the University of California, he engaged in similar work in the Glendora Foot-hills School in Glendora, California, the La Jolla School in Placentia, California, and the Garfield School in Santa Monica, California. However, Meriam did not produce any major publications explicating his work in these schools as he did with his work at University Elementary School. As a matter of fact, Meriam continued to publish articles, but his writing usually referenced the work he had done at University Elementary School. This leads one to question whether Meriam was able to achieve the same results in California that he had achieved in Missouri. Research into his work at these California schools could provide information regarding his success or failure to replicate his work, as well as the factors that contributed to his success or failure. His success or failure and the contributing factors would help to determine whether an attempt to recreate his curriculum and methods is feasible and what adjustments might need to be made to ensure success of the experiment.

While today's society differs from the society of the early twentieth century, the problems that educators face have not changed. Then as now, educators struggled with the issue of what they should consider in developing the curriculum: the nature and needs of the learner, the nature of society, or the nature of the subject matter. Educators now, however, have the ability

to research curriculum history spanning over one hundred years. Researching curricula implemented in the past can inform educators regarding what worked and what did not, potentially ending the perpetual swing of the pendulum.

### Conclusion

Meriam's work at University Elementary school demonstrated a curriculum that focused on the needs of children without regard to their future plans. Even while enabling children to live more efficiently as children, however, the curriculum was preparing them for the future. While today's schools might not be able to implement the same curriculum that Meriam implemented at University Elementary School, his principles could be the foundation for the development of a curriculum appropriate for today's society. Rather than selecting the curriculum from the traditional academic subjects, the curriculum could be selected from the activities of real life, which could give the curriculum more meaning for all students. Students could still acquire skills in the traditional subjects and could actually see their relevance when the position of those subjects in the curriculum is relegated to the incidental position they hold in real life. Students could pursue topics in which they are interested, and they might enjoy school more and have a better idea about what they would like to do when they graduate from

high school. Regardless of whether one sees the purpose of education as preparation for the future or enabling students to live better lives while they are students, a curriculum based on Meriam's principles fulfills the purpose.

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