Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to frame a social history of the American school curriculum since 1950 by exploring the interplay between proposals that have been advanced for what the schools should teach and what actually has occurred as schools have attempted to put those recommendations into practice. Our starting point is the life adjustment education movement and the conflict that emerged between its champions and another group of curriculum reformers enamored of discipline-centered curriculum reform. The resulting essay examines the conflict between these two groups of reformers from the 1950s onward and consideres its impact on what the schools have taught. We will then consider how that conflict has played itself out from the 1970s onward and what that tells us about the contemporary school curriculum.

Keywords

Social history of curriculum, Education for life adjustment, discipline-centered curriculum, Basic skills instruction, educational standards