Quelle

The Study of History in Schools: A Report to the American Historical Association by the Committee of Seven (1898)[1]

Preliminary Work of the Committee

[…] In the German gymnasia the course of history, from Homeric times to the present day, is covered with great thoroughness and system. To this part of the report on the German schools we wish to call special attention, for while we do not think that it is profitable for us, even in this particular, to follow the German curriculum exactly, we believe that there should be an effort on the part of those who are organizing programmes to reach toward this ideal, by extending the course of history over a number of years, and by developing it in accordance with the psychological principles which have been adhered to in the preparation of the German course of study. […]

The system and methods of instruction in the schools of France are interesting, but somewhat less suggestive than those of the German schools. There, as in Germany, history is in the hands of trained teachers, who have a capacity for holding the pupil's attention, arousing interest, and developing a love for historical study, as well as for giving a vast amount of historical information. The course of study is long, thorough, and systematically organized. The conditions of German Switzerland are essentially similar to those of Germany itself.

The situation in England does not offer many valuable lessons to American teachers. The most noticeable features are a lack of historical instruction, a common failure to recognize the value of history, and a certain incoherence and general confusion. We cannot here discuss the reasons for these conditions. It is enough to say that the laissez faire idea has been carried farther and is more marked in England than in America; for, on the whole, we have an educational system, and each passing year shows an increase in the common stock of principles. And yet one who examines the condition of historical instruction in this country, and compares it with that of France and Germany, feels that Englishmen and Americans are of one blood; the individualistic spirit of the race has found unusual expression in educational practices, and has made against cooperation and harmony, while instinctive aversion to theoretical arrangement has hindered the development of general principles. A comparison of English conditions with those of the continent will be likely to show the value of system and order, and the advantage resulting from the sway of good pedagogical doctrines. We must endeavor in America to reach a system of our own, and to recognize the force of sound principles, without losing sight of the fact that our local conditions are many, and that we must rely on individual initiative and enthusiasm, if not on impulse. Nevertheless, in spite of local diversity, and in spite of the fact that a rigid régime seems on the whole impossible if not undesirable, in this country, there are sound general principles that may be termed absolute rather than relative. […]

While it is impossible to transplant any foreign course of study to our schools, and unwise to imitate blindly European methods of instruction, there are at least two lessons that may be learned from foreign schools; namely, the wisdom of demanding thoroughly trained teachers of history, and that of giving a large place to historical instruction in all courses.

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[1] The Study of History in Schools: A Report to the American Historical Association by the Committee of Seven (1898), Washington 1898. Der Volltext ist auf der Webseite der AHA zu finden, URL: <http://www.historians.org/pubs/archives/CommitteeofSeven/index.cfm> (18.04. 2012). Die Druckversion der Quelle findet sich in: Isabella Löhr, Matthias Middell, Hannes Siegrist (Hgg.): Kultur und Beruf in Europa, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2012, S. 186–188, Band 2 der Schriftenreihe Europäische Geschichte in Quellen und Essays.

Appendix III: History in German Gymnasia

[…] The curriculum in every State is the same in the same class of schools, and the uniformity among the twenty-six different State systems is far greater than among the forty-five States of America. […] The curriculum is a unit; it is complete in itself, but it represents at the same time one stage in the development of the educational system. This fact must never be lost sight of, or the corresponding fact that the American programme of studies presents an absolute contrast to the German Lehrplan. The American programme is often regarded as a convenient vehicle for conveying the instruction desired by interested parties. Does a State legislature believe that the schools exist for the purpose of implanting patriotism, they are forthwith commanded to teach American history; if a group of business men believe that the schools should have a bread-and-butter aim, stenography and typewriting are made compulsory; if one branch of the church considers that the schools exist for the purpose of teaching religion, the study of the catechism is demanded; if an association deems that it is the first duty of the schools to inculcate the principles advocated by that association, it asks for the study of physiology with special reference to the injurious effects of alcoholic drinks. The American programme represents the idiosyncrasies of individuals, not the wisdom of the many. […]

What are the lessons to be learned by Americans from this examination of historical instruction in the German gymnasia? The first great lesson we should all do well to heed is this: That the course in history serves the double purpose of being complete in itself and of being an ideal preparation for university work.

The course is complete in itself; because, if the boy does not go beyond the gymnasium, or if he leaves at the end of the sixth year in school, he has gained a wide outlook into the future because of this thorough study of the past; he has gained a proper historical perspective and he has learned that "hinter dem Gebirge sind auch Leute". […]

But the special object of the German gymnasial course is to prepare for the university. […] And here, in the case of the boy who enters the university, as in the case of the boy who does not, the German arrangement of historical work seems superior to our own. The university knows precisely what work in history has been done, and therefore it can assume this admirable preparation and shape its advanced courses accordingly. But the American university or college makes its entrance requirement in history in deference to the antiquated idea that preparation in history should be the one that will most assist the study of Latin and Greek, and that every boy should know something of the history of his own country. The boy therefore studies American history in the grammar grades, and Greek and Roman history in the high school-an arrangement of studies radically wrong, because false chronologically and false in principle. On such a basis it is impossible to build up a systematic course of history in the college or the university without doing in the college a part of the work that should have been done before entrance. […]

This conclusion must follow: The work in history in American schools will never be on a rational basis until, as in Germany, it recognizes the double purpose that history in these schools is to serve; until it is so organized as to give the boy or girl who does not go to college a well-rounded conception of the epoch-making events in the world's history; until it plans its college entrance requirements in history with reference to the college work in history; until it makes the course of history in the schools identical for those who do, and for those who do not, go to college; until it correlates the work done in history with the work of every other subject in the school curriculum.

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