

A COMPARISON OF JAMES B. CONANT'S RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION
WITH THOSE OF PREVIOUS EDUCATORS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
The Problem	2
Statement of the Problem	2
Importance of the Study	2
Limitations of the Study	3
Definition	3
Organization of the Remainder of the Report . . .	4
Sources of Data and Method of Procedure	4
THE REPORT OF THE STUDY	5
The Committee of Ten - 1894	5
Alexander Inglis - 1918	7
William L. Wrinkle - 1938	10
Educational Policies Commission - 1947	11
James B. Conant - 1959	15
COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS	17
Comparisons	17
Analysis	21
Conclusion	24
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	26
REFERENCES CITED	27

INTRODUCTION

It is possible to examine the newspapers, magazines, and other literature and find that there is a great deal of controversy about today's educational system. Much of what has been written consists of criticisms made on the basis of casual observation by the author, or perhaps on the basis of a specific problem which had irritated someone enough to write a complaint. Fortunately, however, not all criticism was of this type.

There were also many prominent educators who felt that "appraising and improving secondary schools should be a continuous process because of changes in society."¹ These were the men and women who

made recommendations for improvement as well as criticisms, and did so only after studying the high schools of the United States so that there would be some basis for both. A number of these studies have been given national publicity and are of value in appraising the high school and in making improvements.²

The most recent and probably most widely known statement of criticism and recommendations for improving secondary education was that produced by Dr. James Conant. Dr. Conant, with the assistance of several other educators, obtained factual data of practices then being carried out in

¹R. K. Bent and H. H. Kronenberg, Principles of Secondary Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1961), p. 420.

²Ibid., p. 423.

many high schools throughout the United States. He then took his recommendations from those practices which he considered to be of greatest importance and feasibility for secondary education in general. "It follows," said Dr. Conant, "from the premises of my study that my recommendations would include only what I had found to be well-established features of at least one school."³

The Problem

Statement of the Problem. The purpose of this study was to compare selected recommendations made by James B. Conant, for the improvement of American secondary education, with those made by other prominent educators or groups of educators.

Importance of the Study. The study and comparison of recommendations issued at various times in the past is a study of trends in educational theory and practice.

Any recommendation of value should be made in terms of what are thought to be the functions of education in society. In turn, these functions should be determined by what society expects and needs from education. Our society is ever changing and with it needs are being altered. Thus,

³James B. Conant, The American High School Today (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1959), p. 41.

the functions of and also the recommendations for improving education are never constant but continuously undergoing revision.

As . . . group practices, interests, beliefs, and outlooks change, the program of the school also changes. In this basic sense education is a social affair. Educational choices are always, in the last analysis, social changes.⁴

This comparison of suggested improvements is a comparison of social changes. By examining past trends and thinking of them in terms of the society of which they were a part, perhaps it would be possible to find present and future educational trends through social changes which are occurring today.

Limitations of the Study

The time of this study is limited to selected intervals from the Committee of Ten (1895) to the time of Conant's recommendations (1960).

Because the study included only five sources, the reference materials used were few.

Definition

Probably the only term which needs consideration here

⁴John L. Childs, Education and Morals (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1950), pp. 21-24, 26-28, cited by August Kerber and Wilfred Smith, Educational Issues in a Changing Society (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1962), p. 97.

is the term "recommendation." In this study a recommendation will be thought of as any constructive criticism or suggestion for the improvement of secondary education issued by a leading educational authority.

Organization of the Remainder of the Report

The next two sections of the text are made up of the report of the study, including all the recommendations considered, and the final section which includes the comparisons and conclusions.

Sources of Data and Method of Procedure

The material used for this report came entirely from the literature. Wherever possible, the original statements were used rather than another author's interpretation of the original work.

The procedure involved three steps--first, a review of the literature; second, the selection of various recommendations related to the curriculum; and third, the listing of any similarities and differences which exist. From these comparisons the conclusion was drawn. Since most recommendations were stated in terms of the curriculum, an attempt was made to limit all considerations to the curriculum.

THE REPORT OF THE STUDY

This section might also be called a review of the literature since most of the material in the section is recommendations which have been selected from the writings of various authors. The comparisons and conclusions have been reserved for the final section.

The Committee of Ten - 1894

This committee was appointed by the National Education Association in July of 1892. Its initial purpose was the development of a uniform set of college entrance requirements, but it is remembered today for the recommendations it made about high school curriculums. As was stated earlier, in the importance of the study, any recommendations made should be based upon some concept of what the function or objectives of secondary education should be. It should be useful in the comparisons which follow to know the objectives upon which the various recommendations were based.

The Committee of Ten wisely foresaw that the first and basic question was to determine the function of the high school, to plan a suitable program for fulfilling that function, and then to proceed to the problem of college admission for graduates from such a school.⁵

⁵W. M. Alexander and J. G. Saylor, Modern Secondary Education (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), p. 149.

The practical curriculum was given importance when the committee said that "a secondary school programme intended for national use must therefore be made for those children whose education is not to be pursued beyond the secondary school."⁶ However, this was not thought to be the only function of education, for the committee also stated that "it is obviously desirable that the colleges and scientific schools should be accessible to all . . . who have completed creditably the secondary school course."⁷

The Committee of Ten saw the dual function of the secondary school; the education of those who would enter adult work life after high school, and the preparation of the more able students for continuation in a college or scientific school. Keeping these two functions in mind, it is interesting to examine the recommendations made by the committee for the fulfillment of the functions.

The recommendations made by the Committee of Ten were the result of their study and discussion of nine conference reports. These conferences were created by the committee. Each conference was composed of ten members acquainted with their particular subject of discussion. The nine subjects were: Latin, Greek, English, other modern languages,

⁶Ibid., p. 150.

⁷Ibid., p. 150.

mathematics, physics and chemistry, natural history, history and civil government, and geography. The major topics to be considered were (1) the proper limits of the subject, (2) methods of instruction, (3) time allotment, and (4) the methods of testing achievement.⁸

The committee's final report for the secondary school was in the form of a suggested four-year curriculum (Fig. 1). One basic program was for every student, no matter what his or her future was to be.

Alexander Inglis - 1918

At the same time that Inglis was writing these statements about changing education, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education was also at work.

Inglis criticized the statements of the Committee of Ten, and these criticisms were consistent with his recommendations. To better understand how Inglis felt, his criticisms of the Committee of Ten are indicated first.

1. No vocational arts subjects were included.
2. The college admission function was too dominant.*
3. Curriculum differentiation was on the basis of subjects rather than on post-school life and work.

⁸Ibid., p. 148.

*The original purpose of the Committee of Ten was the establishment of uniform college entrance requirements.

FIGURE I
THE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM RECOMMENDED
BY THE COMMITTEE OF TEN⁹

FIRST YEAR	Periods per week	SECOND YEAR	Periods per week
Latin	5	Latin	5
English literature 3	5	Greek	5
English composition 2	4	English literature 3	5
German (or French)	4	English composition 2	4
Algebra	5	German	4
History of Italy, Spain, and France	3	French	4
European Political- continental and oceanic flora and fauna	4	Algebra* 2 1/2	5
		Geometry 2 1/2	5
		Botany or zoology	3
		English history to 1688	3
THIRD YEAR		FOURTH YEAR	
Latin	5	Latin	5
Greek	4	Greek	4
English literature 3	5	English literature 3	5
English composition 1	4	English composition 1	4
Rhetoric 1	4	English grammar 1	4
German	4	German	4
French	5	French	2
Algebra 2 1/2	5	Trigonometry	5
Geometry 2 1/2	5	Higher algebra	3
Chemistry	3	Physics	3
History, English and American	3	History (intensive) and Civil government	4
Astronomy 1/2 year	3	Geology or Physiography 1/2 year 2	4
Meteorology 1/2 year	3	Anatomy, Physiology, and Hygiene 1/2 year 2	2

*Option of bookkeeping and commercial arithmetic.

⁹Committee of Ten, Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies (New York: American Book, Co., 1894), p. 37.

4. Foreign languages occupied too much time.
5. No provision was made for the pupil who did not finish school.
6. There was too little flexibility.

Inglis recommended dividing the curriculum into several groupings. First, however, he said that "by the tenth grade, students should be grouped according to their dominant interests, abilities, and destinies, at least in a tentative fashion."¹⁰ The curriculum groupings which he thought to be necessary were:

1. Business and clerical--bookkeeping, stenography, typing, etc.
2. Industrial--building trades, wood-working, metal-working, etc.
3. Agricultural--general farming, animal husbandry, etc.
4. Domestic--homemaking, nursing, institutional skills.
5. Preparatory--academic and technical college, normal school.
6. General curriculum--for those of uncertain futures.
7. Special curriculums--art, music, etc., for large

¹⁰A. Inglis, Princ. of Sec. Ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918), p. 668.

schools.¹¹

William L. Wrinkle--1938

Thinking again in terms of the functions or purposes of education, Wrinkle thought its purpose was the "development of values, justifiable on the basis of their worth in enabling each individual to live his life more effectively, both as an individual and as a member of society."¹²

Wrinkle suggested the use of "broad fields of experience" in the curriculum in carrying out the above purpose. These fields were:

1. Science--experiences in a physical and natural environment.
2. Social studies--experiences involving people.
3. Literature and language--experiences of communication.
4. Experiences in the arts.
5. Socializing experiences.

He went on to state that these fields were not distinct units in themselves but that one field should cover the experiences involved in several of the others. Also, he thought that specialized courses, like algebra, foreign languages, ancient

¹¹Ibid., pp. 688-689.

¹²William L. Wrinkle, The New High School in the Making (New York: American Book Co., 1938), p. 26.

history, economics, and others should have been eliminated or highly restricted.¹³

Educational Policies Commission - 1947

This branch of the National Education Association had a great deal of influence on education, particularly before 1955. The recommendations given here were based on the needs common to all youth as stated by the Educational Policies Commission.¹⁴ Following each stated need are one or more practices suggested for meeting that need.¹⁵

1. All youth need to develop saleable skills and those understandings and attitudes that make the worker an intelligent and productive participant in economic life. To this end, most youth need supervised work experience as well as education in the skills and knowledge of their occupations.

- a. Vocational subjects along with cooperative work programs.
- b. Supervised vacation and Saturday jobs.
- c. Use of guidance in each individual's vocational

¹³Ibid., pp. 30-31.

¹⁴Educational Policies Commission, Education for ALL American Youth, (Washington 6, D. C.: Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association, 1944).

¹⁵Paul E. Elicker, et al., "The Imperative Needs of Youth," Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals of the National Education Association, XXXI (March, 1947), pp. 7-144.

choice.

2. All youth need to develop and maintain good health and physical fitness.

- a. Provision of education in personal, home, and community health.
- b. Physical activities to arouse interest and build confidence.

3. All youth need to understand the rights and duties of a citizen of a democratic society and to be diligent and competent in the performance of their obligations as members of the community and citizens of the state and nation.

- a. Study of governmental philosophy and structure.
- b. Study of current problems and events.
- c. Guidance for showing to each his unique position in society.

4. All youth need to understand the significance of the family for the individual and society and the conditions conducive to successful family life.

- a. Provision of a wide variety of co-educational activities.
- b. Etiquette education.
- c. Sex education.
- d. Study of family relationships and responsibilities.
- e. Study of family skills--budgeting, clothing, food, luxuries, etc.

5. All youth need to know how to purchase and use goods and services intelligently, understanding both the values received by the consumer and the economic consequences of their acts.

This topic should influence nearly all subjects. Art classes could point out good taste in dress, etc. Shop classes would give a boy an understanding of what a good piece of furniture is. Other subjects such as mathematics, business education, social studies, science, and others will also be affected.

6. All youth need to understand the methods of science, the influence of science on human life, and the main scientific facts concerning the nature of the world and of man.

- a. The provision of science classes.
- b. Teaching the scientific method of problem solving.
- c. Provision of laboratories, audio, visual, and physical aids to learning.
- d. Providing for special interests and abilities.

7. All youth need opportunities to develop their capacities to appreciate beauty in literature, art, music, and nature.

- a. Provision of needed facilities--art, music, and reading rooms.
- b. Provision through the organization of the day.

8. All youth need to be able to use their leisure time

well and to budget it wisely, balancing activities that yield satisfaction to the individual with those which are socially useful.

- a. Training in the use of leisure.
- b. Provision of drama, art, music, movies, literature, and school camps near by for week ends or vacations.
- c. Teaching of the active duties of citizenship usually carried out in times of leisure.
- d. Safety education for leisure time.

9. All youth need to develop respect for other persons, to grow in their insights into ethical values and principles, and to be able to live and work cooperatively with others.

- a. Stress the importance of the group in any activity.
- b. Character education with the provision of a value system.

10. All youth need to grow in their ability to think rationally, to express their thoughts clearly, and to read and listen with understanding.

- a. Teaching of problem solving and acceptance of different points of view to develop rational thinking.
- b. More reading in subjects and leisure time.
- c. Special remedial reading for the slow readers.
- d. Instruction in terms of personal abilities.

James B. Conant - 1959

Dr. Conant mentioned three major objectives which he believed the high school to have had. First, the high school should provide a general education for all students since each will someday be a citizen. Second, the provision of elective programs for those who did not wish to continue their education past high school was necessary. Third, to provide an adequate academic program for those who would go on to a college or a university was necessary.¹⁶

Conant suggested the following improvements in secondary education.

1. A comprehensive counseling program.
2. Individualized, personally adjusted programs of study.
3. Subject by subject ability grouping.
4. Composition as one-half of the English program.
5. Diversified vocational offerings.
6. Remedial training for the very slow readers.
7. These minimum required programs for the average and the academically talented.

¹⁶Conant, op. cit., p. 17.

REQUIRED	AVERAGE STUDENT YEARS	STUDENT ELECTIVE
English	4	At least seven more courses not including physical education.
Social Studies	3-4	
Mathematics	1	
Science	1	

ACADEMICALLY TALENTED SUBJECT	STUDENT YEARS
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Mathematics	4
Foreign language	4
Science	3
English	4
Social Studies	3

8. College courses for the highly gifted students in high school.
9. A grade of C in an introductory course as a prerequisite for admission to the ensuing advanced course.
10. A voluntary developmental reading class open to anyone.
11. Tuition free summer school.
12. The provision of three or four years of a foreign language when asked for by the students.
13. The teaching of science for diverse interests.
14. The use of homerooms to promote social understandings.
15. A twelfth grade social studies class on current issues in society and government.¹⁷

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 44-75.

COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This final section of the report is an analysis of the suggestions listed in the previous section. First, the suggestions are compared for similarities and differences, then some conclusions are drawn.

Comparisons

In order to be as objective as possible, the recommendations are compared in tabular form. The standard for comparison is the group of recommendations made by Conant. First, there is a list of similarities to Conant's suggestions, then a list of the differences which existed. In the table of similarities, those which are similar are mentioned. A blank space does not necessarily indicate the existence of a difference. In the same way, a blank space in the table of differences does not indicate a similarity. It may be that that specific author had not mentioned that topic.

TABLE OF SIMILARITIES

The Committee of Ten	Alexander Inglis	William L. Wrinkle	Educational Policies Commission	James B. Conant
	Counseling implied by proposed groupings.		Guidance in vocations and citizen education	1. Comprehensive counseling.

TABLE OF SIMILARITIES (continued)

The Committee of Ten	Alexander Inglis	William L. Wrinkle	Educational Policies Commission	James B. Conant
		Individualized in the total broad field of experience.	Individualized instruction.	2. Individualized programs of study.
	Grouping in the curriculums by ability.			3. Subject by subject ability grouping.
About 1/2 the time in English was in composition.				4. Composition as 1/2 the English program.
	Vocational arts should be offered		Vocational subjects and work projects.	5. Diversified vocational programs.
			Remedial classes for slow readers.	6. Remedial reading classes.
				7. Required programs: a. Average 4 Years English Soc. Studies 1 Year Math Science b. Talented 4 Years Math Foreign Lang. English 3 Years Science Soc. Studies
English and history, 4 years. Math, English, and foreign language, 4 years.		Science is one broad field of experience.	Science is one of the needs of youth.	

TABLE OF SIMILARITIES (continued)

The Committee of Ten	Alexander Inglis	William L. Wrinkle	Educational Policies Commission	James B. Conant
3 years of two modern languages plus the two classical languages.				12. 3 or 4 years of one foreign language if asked for.
		Science is one field of experi- ence for all interests.		13. Teach science for diverse interests.
			Study of current problems and events.	15. Social studies class in current problems.

TABLE OF DIFFERENCES

The Committee of Ten	Alexander Inglis	William L. Wrinkle	Educational Policies Commission	James B. Conant
One basic program for everyone.	Curricular tracks of study.			2. Individualized programs of study.
Math and science, 4 years. Science and Social Studies, 4 years.		Severely restrict such subjects as foreign language and algebra.		7. Required programs: a. Average 4 years English Soc. Studies 1 Year Math Science b. Talented 4 Years Math Foreign Lang. English 3 Years Science Soc. Studies
		Probably would have had such classes eliminated.		8. College type courses for the highly gifted.
				9. Keep advanced courses academic.
				10. Developmental reading classes.

TABLE OF DIFFERENCES (continued)

The Committee of Ten	Alexander Inglis	William L. Wrinkle	Educational Policies Commission	James B. Conant
				11. Tuition free summer schools.
	Less foreign language.	Foreign language should be discarded from the school.		12. 3 or 4 years of one foreign language if asked for.
These courses are strictly academic.				13. Teach science for diverse interests.
				14. Home-rooms to promote social understanding.

Analysis. One interesting thing to note is that the authority with which Conant had the highest number of similarities and the fewest differences was the Educational Policies Commission (E.P.C.). Conant was a member of this commission, which may be part of the reason for the above fact. Also, however, there is the fact that Conant and the E.P.C. worked in nearly the same period of history.

Many of Dr. Conant's recommendations were similar to those stated earlier. He and the Committee of Ten supported academic subjects. However, Conant stressed their importance

more for the academically talented and gifted than for the average student. Foreign languages in particular were recommended by both authorities.

Inglis and Conant each felt that vocational subjects and some guidance were necessary. Again, however, Inglis emphasized the vocational arts more than Conant.

Wrinkle, being influenced by the progressive movement, appeared to place emphasis upon the individual child. Conant, too, suggested that each student should have his own program of studies, but he did not appear to carry the idea to as great an extent as did Wrinkle.

The Educational Policies Commission made statements, about several topics, which agreed with what Conant later suggested. Both thought that guidance was a necessity in vocation selection and in personal orientation. The importance of vocational subjects, previously established, was supported by each. Remedial reading was something new with the E.P.C. and Conant, too, recognized its importance. A consideration of contemporary problems of society and government was also recognized as a necessary part of everyone's education.

The recommendations of Conant not mentioned by previous authors were generally either quite recent trends--developmental reading and tuition free summer schools--or they were very specific--college courses for the gifted and

homerooms to promote social understanding.

It has been stated that Conant and the Committee of Ten issued suggestions considerably alike.¹⁸ However, this study points out several minor differences and one which was quite large. Both saw the dual function of preparing some for further schooling and others for adult life immediately after high school. The Committee of Ten based their advice on the assumption that the mental training and exercise included in a classical curriculum were what the student should have. That is to say that one curriculum was sufficient for everyone. Conant, however, specified that each person should have his or her own individualized program of studies throughout the high school years.

Inglis felt that the foreign languages in the curriculum of the Committee of Ten occupied too much time. He would probably disagree with Conant, too, on the place of foreign language in the high school. Conant suggested a program of study for each individual, but Inglis advised a different organization. His plan was to group students into several curricular tracks, each track leading to a definite goal, such as college, marriage, farming, business, or industrial trades. Conant was trying to escape from such a track organization because of the social prestige attached

¹⁸Bent and Kronenberg, op. cit., p. 425.

to the college preparatory and social stigma to some of the vocational arts tracks.

Wrinkle advocated that highly specialized subjects, such as foreign language and algebra, be eliminated or highly limited. This is an obvious difference from Conant's suggested four years of foreign language and mathematics for the talented students.

No differences were found between Conant's advised improvements and those of the Educational Policies Commission. More than likely there are some which exist, but none have been revealed in this study.

Conclusion

From the information analyzed for this study it seems logical to say that most of what Dr. Conant recommended for the American high school had previously been suggested. However, this is not to imply that he had taken his information from past literature, for his information was obtained directly by himself and a committee of workers. The information which guided Dr. Conant was direct evidence of successful practices found in various high schools throughout the United States.

In the past, authorities in education have emphasized first one need or goal then another. Each time this happened there was a general tendency toward certain practices or

types of curriculums and some of these remained in the educational community as accepted procedure. The result of the movement to provide more adequately for the student who would not go on to college was the acceptance by educators of the importance of the vocational arts. Later, the progressives turned the attention of educators from subject matter to center around the child and his needs. These were the types of practices reported by Conant.

Practices which he reported were evident and in use because they were brought to the attention of administrators and teachers by educational leaders, such as those in this study, and by the structure and needs of society of that time. Therefore, Dr. Conant has presented his suggestions for a better secondary school, but he has also pointed out some of the trends in present day education.

There is at least one question which is closely related to this study but is beyond its scope. Are these trends in education related to the society of which they are a part and if they are related, in what ways?

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Many people today, both educators and those not directly involved with education, believe that most of what Dr. Conant recommended for the high schools were entirely new concepts, procedures, and methods. This study was made to determine if his suggestions were actually so revolutionary, or if much of what he said had been developed at an earlier date and used at least for a while in some schools.

The purpose, of the study, then, was to compare selected recommendations made by James B. Conant, for the improvement of secondary education, with those made by other prominent educators or groups of educators.

The procedure involved in obtaining information was first the selection of authorities to be used in the study. They were chosen so that the time interval from the Committee of Ten (1895) to the time of Conant (1959) would be nearly evenly divided. Any suggestions related to the curriculum which these men made for improving secondary schools were included in the study.

After the recommendations were selected they were compared for similarities and differences. From this information the final conclusion was drawn.

The Committee of Ten (1895) relied almost entirely upon the academic subjects to exercise and train the mind to think. Thus the curriculum was the same for every student. Conant, too, felt that the academic subjects were important, but that they should be balanced with those which are not so

academic. His suggestion was that each student should have his own individualized program of studies. Thus those who were more talented academically should carry more academic subjects than those with average talents.

Inglis and Conant agreed quite readily upon the necessity of vocational subjects in the high school curriculum. Inglis appeared to place more emphasis on this area than did Conant, to the exclusion of what Conant considered to be important academic subjects. One other difference concerns the program of studies. Conant recommended the individualized program for each student, and Inglis suggested that each student choose one of several curricular tracks to follow. Conant felt that the track organization tended to draw some into the college preparatory, because of the social prestige and parental pressure, who did not belong there. Also, some would not enter the vocational tracks because of social stigma attached to the track.

Wrinkle seems to have been particularly concerned that each child's needs be met. Conant agreed with this when he suggested the individualized program of studies for each student. These two men disagree on the necessity of including academic subjects in the high school curriculum. Wrinkle thought that such specific subjects should be eliminated or highly restricted. Conant, however, advised some academic work for nearly everyone.

The use of guidance, remedial reading classes, and

vocational subjects were three of the things upon which Conant agreed with the Educational Policies Commission. They were found to have had no differences within this study.

From the information obtained in this study it may be logically concluded that much of what Dr. Conant suggested as practices for improving the high school had already been stated and usually put into use. His ideas were not entirely new, but this is not to subtract from the importance of his statements. They are important not only as guidelines for the future, but they also point out present social and educational trends.