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Hilda Taba [Dictionary Entry]

Chara H. Bohan

Georgia State University, cbohan@gsu.edu

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Taba, Hilda. Hilda Taba (1902-1967), a woman of strong leadership and astute scholarship, was a twentieth-century pioneer in curriculum development who contributed conspicuously to major developments in American education. Although her accomplishments were varied and numerous, her collaborators are often better known. Having studied under William Heard Kilpatrick and John Dewey, Taba's educational theories and practices derived from progressive educational philosophy. Taba contributed several important ideas to the curriculum field, many of which remain at the forefront of curriculum discourse and practice.

Born in Estonia, Taba came to the United States in 1926 as a European Fellow at Bryn Mawr College, where she earned her master's degree. She continued graduate work with a doctorate in educational administration at Teachers College, Columbia University, the center of progressive educational thought in the 1920s and 1930s. There she clearly was influenced by the work not only of Dewey and Kilpatrick but also of renowned scholars such as Harold Rugg, George S. Counts, Edward L. Thorndike, and L. Thomas Hopkins. Her dissertation, "The Dynamics of Education" (1932), provided a comprehensive portrayal of progressive educational thought as well as an analysis of factors that contribute to curriculum development. In 1933, she received a fellowship to pursue postdoctoral work at Syracuse University, and she also began a position as German teacher and curriculum director at the prestigious Dalton School in New York City [see Dalton Plan"].

Taba's work at Dalton provided her with the opportunity to meet and, eventually, to work with Ralph W. Tyler, research director of the Progressive Education Association's noted Eight-Year Study. An ambitious attempt to excite curriculum reform, the study, with Carnegie Foundation support, enrolled thirty high schools (one later withdrew) and thousands of students. During the study, colleges suspended other entrance requirements for the study's schools. Consequently, these students were able to pursue an experimental curriculum plan. The study evaluation compared students who experienced experimental curricula with students who followed traditional college-entrance programs, in hopes that high school curricula might be improved and reformed. Its most prominent finding was that experimental school graduates succeeded as well in college as did graduates of traditional college preparatory programs.

As Dalton's curriculum director, Taba drafted proposals to create an integrated curriculum. Initially, she developed a plan in which the problems of human thought and life served as central organizing themes. Adroit at understanding human relations, Taba realized that the plan's success depended upon teacher support and expressed hope that integrated thinking would develop for both student and teachers. Clearly impressed with Taba's work, Tyler invited her in 1935 to become an associate on the evaluation staff of the Eight-Year Study then based at Ohio State University.

Her staff work catapulted Taba into national prominence as an educational researcher and consultant for social studies teachers. As part of developing evaluation instruments, Taba helped the faculties of the thirty experimental schools to formulate objectives to facilitate student learning. Later, she directed the Committee on Social Sensitivity, which constructed special tests. In order to facilitate the work of the Eight-Year Study, Taba established in-service teacher education* workshops that brought together teachers from the thirty schools to share ideas, discuss curriculum, and practical problems. Ultimately, this effort enabled Taba to experiment with many ideas that would reappear in her thinking over time. These included integration of the curriculum around significant problems and issues, development of democratic attitudes, and approaches to curriculum development as an ongoing dynamic process.

After her work on the Eight-Year Study, Taba continued to contribute to curriculum development nationally. In 1945, she became codirector of the Intergroup Education Project as well as assistant professor of education at the University of Chicago.* Initially, the project sought to change attitudes and behavioral patterns toward members of racial and ethnic minority groups. As the project progressed, its

goals broadened to include the dynamics of human relations between groups such as students, parents, siblings, and teachers. It assisted teachers, administrators, and community leaders and attracted much favorable publicity. Participating teachers worked in groups and did much of the actual curriculum development. Taba assisted the teachers with important ideas about the sequence of curriculum development activities and ways to organize content and learning experiences. Another unique aspect of the project was Taba's insistence that teachers conduct classroom-based research and gather data about their students in order to determine the adequacy of the curriculum. Taba and others called this "action research"; it reflected much of Dewey's thinking about the process for managing a problem. Taba coedited the Sixteenth Yearbook of the National Council of the Social Studies, which focused on intergroup education. In fall 1951, Taba became professor of education at San Francisco State College. For sixteen years until her death, Taba conducted there some of her most significant practical and theoretical work in curriculum development. Especially fruitful was her longtime relationship with elementary teachers in Contra Costa County schools. These efforts focused on social studies curriculum and continued for two years after she died. In its later stages, it became known as the "Taba Curriculum Development Project." A special aspect focused on the development of student thinking in elementary social studies. With support from the US. Office of Education, Taba and teacher colleagues developed an innovative elementary social studies curriculum. Ultimately published, it set standards for such programs. In the midst of this work, Taba published her most widely acclaimed book, *Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice* (1962), considered a classic in the curriculum field.

Hilda Taba contributed uniquely to the field of curriculum development. She authored, coauthored, or edited over seventy books, journal articles, chapters, and conference reports. Taba also conducted important teacher workshops across the nation. She was at the forefront of educational research, particularly with her work in the Eight-Year Study and the Taba Curriculum Development Project and in action research. Most important, she was a remarkable teacher.

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Chara Haeussler Bohan and O. L. Davis, Jr.