# Integration of Subject Matter and Educational Rigor

**Robert H. Gault**

*Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois*

The slant I am taking upon this subject is doubtless different from what you have anticipated. If my course seems strange to you, I remind you that in our formative years as an American people we elected to develop an individualistic society. Such an order of life was growing here during a couple of centuries or more prior to our Revolutionary War. And long before that it had found a hospitable rootage in the minds and hearts of individuals of consequence and in influential groups on the other side of the Atlantic. The individualistic society does not represent a new adventure; not new at any rate, as compared with the span of life of the human individual, but in relation to the range of history since the dawn of what we call our western civilization, this individualistic type of society is a babe in swaddling clothes. We have yet to see what it shall come to be. Thus far, it has made rich contributions for the advantage of us all and for the future its possibilities are great beyond our ability to imagine them.

At the outset I want to affirm my conviction that this type of society bodies forth the highest ideal that was ever invented for men and women who have to live together. All for the individual, not all for the state. The latter, its government, laws and other institutions, are secondary. They are for the convenience of the individual, not to swallow him up. They are his servants. These servants in the individualistic society are here to facilitate the development of the individual toward attainment of the greatest dimensions of which he is capable. The more closely the individual in this society approximates the attainment of his greatest dimensions the less essential these servants become; the bureaus of government and its machinery generally tend to fade away—not to expand to the extent of obscuring the whole landscape. The great individual that is envisaged by the individualistic society gets on with other people with the very minimum of external control and direction. Direction and control by the wholesale from the outside is the very antithesis of the spirit of the pattern of society we have chosen for ourselves.

As a further preliminary, let us take a glimpse at this individual—the focus of our order of life. Those who would substitute a collectivistic order for ours apparently think of him as something small and narrow on the order of the babe in his cradle: an organization of flesh and limber bones and blood with appetites for food, drink, and comfort; an organization that exercises its own natural initiative in various ways as means to obtain satisfaction; that counts as nothing the measure of inconvenience his obtaining these things may occasion to others. As long as these appetites are satisfied, and by whatever means, it's all right with him.

And throughout his life he never loses these natural urges. But he enlarges them and adds diverse other equipments, and the additions are as much a part of his individuality as the original equipments themselves. What are these additions? In general terms, and in a large part, they are techniques, with many of which you are entirely familiar, such as the arts of reading and computation; mathematical and other scientific formulae; methods of investigation, diagnosis in the field of medicine, perhaps, and of the evaluation of evidence. These techniques supply the grooves by way of which the natural personal initiative of the individual may be directed toward the attainment of satisfaction for his innate appetites.

But of course, we have here come very far from listing what enter into the composition of the great individual. One may use the techniques for computation as means for directing natural initiative toward making a livelihood as a bookkeeper or as an expert accountant, according to the pattern of our society or may use the same techniques as means for directing the same initiative toward defrauding an employer in direct violation of our pattern of social behavior.

Something else in individual psychology over and above familiarity with techniques is an effective determiner of the issue between behavior that accords with our social pattern and what is destructive of it. I am thinking here of affective attitudes and I shall attempt to make clear what I mean by that term.

Everyone here, for example, I presume, is affiliated with a political party. How many of you can give me what, in your soberest moment, you would regard as an intelligent answer to my question why you are so affiliated. Probably no one of you can do it. It is most likely just as a matter of course that you are a Republican or a Democrat. You are this or that and there's the end of it. You have a satisfactory feeling: a feeling of all-rightness about your party. You feel quite comfortable and strong because of your affiliation. It is therefore, an easy matter to whip you up to a state of enthusiasm—and you "do your duty at the polls." It is likewise with your religious and your national affiliations. I am speaking here of political, religious, and national attitudes. The quiet sense of satisfaction that saturates them and their matter-of-courseness mark them as affective attitudes. It is probable that you will never quite shake yourself free from them. You may scratch your ticket but it takes a pull to do it. You may in time lapse from your religious attitude, but you can't bring yourself to it at a fell swoop. And as a matter of course you swell with some pride because you are a citizen of your nation. These attitudes grow in the individual from his childhood because he has been all but continuously breathing the atmosphere of the party, the religious organization and the nation. Their leaders have been repeatedly dramatized before his eyes. So have the great ideals of justice and personal integrity, freedom, and philanthropy, that these leaders represented in their lifetimes till what we may call his affective attitudes of justice and integrity and freedom and philanthropy are deep rooted in his make up, and till he perforce lives all these characteristics as a matter of course. His affective attitudes of justice and philanthropy or fair dealing toward the remotest farmer in the realm may be just as inseparable from him as his appetite for food. Such attitudes are the immediate determinants of the question whether one shall as a matter of course employ one's techniques of computation for earning an honest livelihood or for defrauding another.

I repeat that these attitudes are a part of the composition of every individual; certainly of every normal individual. They are as surely a part of him as is his appetite.

And in the next place I want to make a statement that I have not time to develop: your party, religious, national, philanthropic, attitude is a sense of psychologic unity with others who compose the party, who adhere to the same religious organization or the same nation as that to which you profess allegiance or with those who are philanthropic as you are. In a sense of the word the individual with these attitudes is psychologically identified with those others. He and they are a part of each other. Each is a great individual—not necessarily in the sense of a Napoleon. And therein—in this sense of unity—is solidarity and a sense of invincibility. Out of that is cooperation as a matter of course.

It is the genius of the individualistic society to create these great individuals, be they between the plow handles, in the great centers of finance or in the capitol. It has succeeded in such measure that there is encouragement in the belief that it can meet with more success.

These are the individuals who, I have already suggested, minimize rather than magnify the necessity for external direction and control. And now, I am going to assert that it is only in an individualistic society that individuals can attain to the magnificent proportions of which they are capable. The

necessity of such a social order as ours sternly dictates that men and women shall attain these proportions: that they shall acquire the techniques whereby they may control the world and that they shall grow into a sense of psychologic identity or of belonging together with others who cherish the political, national and ethical ideals that are embodied in our patterns of social behavior. When the necessity of the situation makes its demand upon human nature we are on the way toward accomplishment. But we, in our several capacities as leaders, must be vividly conscious that the necessity exists. We dare not just lazily and as a matter of course acknowledge that it is there and let it go at that.

What are we going to do about it? Are we going to organize some new curricula? Laboriously document the content of each course? I once heard President Butler say: "It makes little difference what subjects are taught; it makes some difference how they are taught, but it makes a great deal of difference who teaches them." Already you are prepared for a violent reaction toward my coldness in respect to the organization of curricula and courses of instruction.

I am recalling now two of my teachers: two who have meant more to me than any other two with whom I had to deal in all my school and college and university days,—unless I should except one or two who worked within the field that has become my specialty. One of those was a teacher of Latin in a small Ohio college—William Notestein; the other was a teacher of Shakesperian literature in a great university—Hiram Corson. The latter, at least, qualified as a great scholar and an exact scholar. But they had in common one very important characteristic: they could dramatize their subject—and they dramatized it. The great persons of the drama moved in the midst of our classrooms; the traits of their characters stood in vivid relief before our eyes; they made us tingle with excitement. They contributed toward making and they roused our positive affective reactions toward the great characters in the literature they were teaching. They made us feel that the admirable traits in these characters were ours too. Thus far, between them and us, we began to sense a psychologic identity. Now that kind of thing can't go on long without creating in the pupils a drive toward perfecting in themselves those character traits that the teacher is dramatizing and at the same time toward making them dynamic.

Every good teacher acts upon these suggestions whether he makes an analysis to discover the whys and the wherefores of his procedures or not.

And so I am urging something very old fashioned: not organization or integration of a curriculum. This, I believe, is of secondary importance. Our pupils must acquire facility in the use of the tools by which they may gain some control of their world, to be sure. That is of first rate and immediate importance. And equally important it is that they acquire a great and vigorous individuality. That is what we must emphasize. And this immediately implies a feeling of identity: a sense of belonging together with those characters who have in the past possessed and demonstrated the qualities of benevolence and philanthropy; of honesty and justice and fair dealing; of personal initiative in the ordinary affairs of everyday living, in the affairs of great business and in statecraft; in all the relations of life. And it implies, likewise, a feeling of identity with those who are now, in our American way of life, demonstrating their possession of these qualities of the great individual. It is upon these things that we must have a new and systematic and continuous emphasis in our teaching of literature and history, science and art. We talk about vitalizing the educational process and we soft pedal the means by which it can be accomplished. We talk about socializing education and at the same time we neglect the very essence of socialization. What is it? Once more it is the individual's matter-of-course, satisfying sense of identity with those people who have in the past exhibited, and who are now exhibiting such qualities as I have mentioned: the qualities of the great individual without which social life can never be in flower.

I have now suggested my idea of the integration of subject matter. It must be integrated about what, by common consent, we will regard as the great personal qualities of those whom, again by common consent, we will

call our great men and women. This demands dramatization of those qualities to the end that our pupils may be helped in developing affective attitudes toward them: that they may be warmed by the feeling that these qualities are as a matter of course to be supremely desired: that the people who exhibited them are THE people. Therein is educational rigor from the point of view of the teaching process and from the view point of the finished product. The debunker is a failure as an educator. That great nebulous abstraction, THE STATE, will get along if we attend to the business that is immediately at our hand: making great individuals. And by the same token, it is the first business of the individual to make himself great in the sense I have indicated. Any other emphasis than that makes a hard character; places a limitation upon the development of the individual; maintains him in a diminutive stature and so obstructs the processes of social life.