"A Marriage on the Rocks"

An Unknown Letter by William H. Kilpatrick about his Project Method

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Abstract

William H. Kilpatrick is worldwide known as "Mr. Project Method." But the origin of his celebrated paper of 1918 has never been explored. The discovery of a hitherto unknown letter reveals that Kilpatrick was an educational entrepreneur who, without regard for language and tradition, adopted the term "project" und used it in a provocative new way to become famous and to be not only remembered as a genial teacher but as an "originator" as well. His paper evoked fierce criticism from friend and foe, including Ernest Horn, Guy M. Wilson, Boyd H. Bode, and John Dewey. In the late 1920's, realizing that he had gotten himself in an indefensible situation, he silently gave up the term und spoke of "activities" when the students carried out their own plans and ideas "heartily" and "purposefully." Contrary to the established view Kilpatrick is not the classic of the project method, but rather the classical outsider.

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No name is more closely associated with the project method than that of William Heard Kilpatrick, the educational philosopher at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. His essay "The Project Method" of September 1918 still counts as the charter of project pedagogy and as one of the most important teaching philosophies of our time. "The article," write Daniel und Laurel Tanner (1990, 157), "created the biggest wave of pedagogical excitement since the Herbartians' five formal steps of instruction; more than sixty thousand reprints poured forth into the educational world in the next quarter century." Kilpatrick is the project classic par excellence. He imbued the project method with its authentic definition, he made it the centrepiece of progressive educational practice, and he disseminated it around the world. Today's historians claim that without Kilpatrick the project method and the project movement would have been unthinkable (cf. Cremin 1961; Ravitch 2000).

Thanks to the biographies of Samuel Tenenbaum (1951) and John A. Beineke (1995), Kilpatrick's essay set off a wave of enthusiasm, bringing him the fame and influence he longed for. At the same time, criticism of his learning concept was no less emphatic. Guy M. Wilson (1922, 58ff.) of Brown University, for instance, objected that the project method was already firmly established and unambiguously defined in manual training and agricultural education, and that Kilpatrick's broad interpretation of it only served to cause chaos and "confusion." Boyd H. Bode (1927, 157ff.) of Ohio State University reproached Kilpatrick with his project being – contrary to what the name implied – not a method at all, since "attitude" and "method" meant two quite dissimilar things. "The way it is done is different from the way that we feel about the business while we are doing it" (Bode 1927, 158). Even John Dewey (1926, 55ff.), the philosopher, colleague, and friend of Kilpatrick at Columbia University, entered the discussion, remarking critically that such a method, leaving to the child alone the decision as to its own learning process, was attempting the "impossible" and, with its Rousseauism, heralded a "relapse into barbarism." The friends of "education through freedom" like Kilpatrick, whom Dewey did not mention by name, were confusing the means and the aim. They failed to realize that thinking was not achieved through the exercise of freedom but, on the contrary, freedom was accomplished through the exercise of thinking. The leadership provided by the teacher to promote the child's ability to think was, Dewey insisted, a precondition for expanding freedom, not a means of suppressing it.

The critiques of Wilson, Bode, Dewey and others did not leave Kilpatrick unaffected. This is made clear by a letter written by the almost eighty-year-old Kilpatrick on 25 January 1950 to Abraham Flexner. A copy of this letter exists in the special collections of Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, which has up till now been neither published nor discovered.

William Heard Kilpatrick was born on 20 November 1871, the son of a Baptist preacher, near Macon in Georgia. He studied at Mercer University, a small private college founded by the Southern Baptists. After further courses in mathematics, he spent four years at public schools in Blakely and Savannah as a teacher and principal. In 1897 Kilpatrick returned to his alma mater as professor of mathematics. Here, too, he achieved rapid promotion, being appointed Vice-President of the university in 1902, and in 1903 entrusted with the provisional presidency of Mercer University, owing to the illness of the incumbent. At this point, however, his career took a downturn. When, on the death of the old university president, a new one was to be elected, he was passed over twice in succession, because of his failure to publicly recognize the "five articles of belief" of the orthodox Baptists who determined the policy of the university. Kilpatrick, a man of pride and honor, drew the necessary conclusions and left Mercer, at first becoming principal of a high school, then enrolling at Columbia's Teachers College in New York City where, from 1907, he took courses in education, psychology, and philosophy, in particular with Edward L. Thorndike, F. J. E. Woodbridge, and John Dewey. After obtaining his doctorate in 1911 with the educational historian Paul Monroe, he was appointed assistant and associate professor of educational philosophy.

In 1915, Kilpatrick was in his mid-forties and, according to his own statement, one of the most popular faculty members at the College. Impatiently, he was awaiting promotion to full professor, but his ambition far exceeded the

acquisition of academic positions. He wanted, as he confided to his diary on 1 January 1917, to achieve "power and influence" and to go down in the annals of the history of education as an "original thinker," not merely as an "acceptable teacher." Kilpatrick realized, though, that he lacked one crucial precondition for achieving this aim, namely publications that were conspicuous and had an impact on the public. In addition to several essays and reviews, he had published two books – his dissertation, *The Dutch Schools of New Netherland and Colonial New York*, and a report on his stay at the Casa dei Bambini in Rome, *The Montessori System Examined*. The third book, *Froebel's Kindergarten Principles Critically Examined*, was approaching its conclusion. Kilpatrick was aware that these accomplishments could not provide the basis for a rapid rise to fame. His books were thorough and critical, but neither original nor inspiring. They addressed only a small circle of readers. "I must now begin," he noted in his diary 24 November 1915, "to think of a small + popular book" – to which he added on another occasion (8/6/1915) "which will appeal constructively + so sell better."

What Kilpatrick was seeking in the spring of 1915 was a topic with which he could create attention and prove himself as an independent educational theorist. It is no wonder that, in his first really independent work, Kilpatrick departed from the tradition, and with the essay "Project Method" presented an antithesis to established concepts of teaching.[1] His pedagogic vision of 1918 appeared – and still does – to many educators as an ideal: students working quietly and with concentration at tasks with which they identify because they themselves have selected and planned them. Kilpatrick summed up his creed in the formula "wholehearted purposeful activity," thus making the student's intrinsic motivation the decisive criterion of the project method. In his concept, there was no proper place for traditional educational features such as teacher, curriculum, and instruction. Project learning, Kilpatrick wrote, was always individual and situative, and could neither be planned nor fixed. "If the purpose dies and the teacher still requires the completion of what was begun, then it becomes a task" – merely wearisome and laborious (Kilpatrick 1925, 348). "Freedom for practice" and "practice with satisfaction" were the slogans with which he effectively staged his "revolt" against drill, discpline, and compulsion (ibd., 348, 311, 56ff.).

The project concept was not Kilpatrick's invention. In fact, the history of the project method begins in the early 18th century, when architects and engineers in Italy and France began to train their students no longer firsthand on building sites or in workshops, but in special schools and academies. At the end of their education, the students were given the task of autonomously preparing plans and drawings for a large building scheme such as a church, a palace, or a bridge. These final assignments, in which problems of construction and design had to be solved not in abstract and theoretical, but in real and practical terms, were called "projects." Seen historically, the project method belongs in the same category as the experiment of the scientist, the case study of the lawyer, and the sand table game of the staff officer; because, as in the experiment, the case study, and the sand table game, the project has its origin in the academization and professionalization of a specific profession. Like these, it was at first introduced in colleges and then – at the end of the 19th century – in schools, so that the students should learn at an early stage to overcome the gap between theory and practice, and to carry out tasks deriving from real life situations independently and efficiently. The proponents of the concept of learning through projects, i. e. through solving "practical problems," were Calvin M. Woodward (1887) in manual training, Rufus W. Stimson (1912) in agricultural education, and John F. Woodhull (1915) in general science.

About 1915 the project method was the topic of discussion everywhere. Even Herbartians und "conservative" educators such as Charles A. McMurry (1903), James E. Russell (1909), and David S. Snedden (1908) spoke in favor of the new method, and Congress in Washington followed the example of the legislature of Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania by making, with the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, considerable funds available for the promotion of "learning by projects" at the newly established vocational full and part-time schools. Surveys made by the US Bureau of

[1] Kilpatrick used the term "project," according to his diary, for the first time on 6 August 1915. He gave the first lecture on the topic just three months later, on 6 November 1915 in Akron, Ohio: "The Problem-Project Method – Its Advantages, Its Limitations." His first paper on the project appeared in January 1917 in the journal General Science Quarterly; and the first version of his famous essay, entitled "How Shall We View Method? The Place of the 'Problem Method' in a Theory of Education. Do We Need a More Inclusive Conception?", he presented on 28 April 1917 to a subcommittee of the Committee on the Economy of Time.

Education found that manual training was taught at 80 percent of schools, and agricultural education at 60 percent, according to the project method (Monahan and Lane 1916, 237; Park and Harlan 1916, 19).

In his essay of 1918, Kilpatrick took over the traditional notion of the project, but expanded it so that it could now refer to any conceivable kind of activity. As before, the term implied making a chest of drawers, raising an acre of pumpkins, and constructing a steam engine (production project), but following Kilpatrick (1918, 332ff.) the concept included now also the solution of a mathematical task (problem project), the learning by heart of a French poem (learning project), and the listening to a gramophone record (consumption project). Whatever the child undertook to do, as long as it was done with "purpose" and procured him "satisfaction," this was a project. It did not even require active behavior, nor the persistently quoted "learning by doing." The children who put on a stage play were carrying out a project just as much as those who sat in the auditorium and enjoyed the performance (Kilpatrick 1925, 346ff.). The famous "typhoid project" of his doctoral student Ellsworth Collings (1923, 54ff.), in which nine- to twelve-year-old students investigated on their own how typhoid was caused, spread and combated, and then enlightened and freed the whole community from the disease, represented to Kilpatrick the ideal realization of his concept.

Kilpatrick's essay set off a wave of enthusiasm, bringing him the fame and influence he longed for. At the same time, criticism of his learning concept was no less emphatic. Guy M. Wilson (1922, 58ff.) of Brown University, for instance, objected that the project method was already firmly established and unambiguously defined in manual training and agricultural education, and that Kilpatrick's broad interpretation of it only served to cause chaos and "confusion." Boyd H. Bode (1927, 157ff.) of Ohio State University reproached Kilpatrick with his project being – contrary to what the name implied – not a method at all, since "attitude" and "method" meant two quite dissimilar things. "The way it is done is different from the way that we feel about the business while we are doing it" (Bode 1927, 158). Even John Dewey (1926, 55ff.), the philosopher, colleague, and friend of Kilpatrick at Columbia University, entered the discussion, remarking critically that such a method, leaving to the child alone the decision as to its own learning process, was attempting the "impossible" and, with its Rousseauism, heralded a "relapse into barbarism." The friends of "education through freedom" like Kilpatrick, whom Dewey did not mention by name, were confusing the means and the aim. They failed to realize that thinking was not achieved through the exercise of freedom but, on the contrary, freedom was accomplished through the exercise of thinking. The leadership provided by the teacher to promote the child's ability to think was, Dewey insisted, a precondition for expanding freedom, not a means of suppressing it.

The critiques of Wilson, Bode, Dewey and others did not leave Kilpatrick unaffected. This is made clear by a letter written by the almost eighty-year-old Kilpatrick on 25 January 1950 to Abraham Flexner. A copy of this letter exists in the special collections of Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, which has up till now been neither published nor discovered.

The recipient of the letter was personally known to Kilpatrick. Abraham Flexner, who was born in Kentucky in 1866 and educated at Harvard, Berlin, and Heidelberg, had made a name with his critical studies on the American universities, and as director of the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton (cf. Bonner 2002). Flexner, however, was not only concerned with the reform of the university, but also that of the school. As a powerful member of the Rockefeller Foundation, he was able to provide the means, in the heyday of "progressive" education, to realize his own ideas of *A Modern School* (Flexner 1916) oriented to "everyday life" and "hands-on experience." Lincoln School, founded at Teachers College in 1917, was up to its closure in 1940 one of the most highly reputed, elitist, and experimental schools in the country (Heffron 1999). Flexner's acquaintance with Kilpatrick and the project method dated from the early days of the school, and now, some thirty years later and in the leisure of old age, Flexner wished to learn more about the origin and history of his colleague's legendary technique of self-education. Kilpatrick wrote a thorough and detailed reply to Flexner's enquiry; indeed, the letter gives the impression that Kilpatrick had only been waiting to give at last a comprehensive account of his educational discoveries, successes, and errors.

Jan. 25, 1950

Dr. Abraham Flexner

522 Fifth Avenue
New York 18, NY

Dear Dr. Flexner:
This is to answer your question on the origin and history of "the Project Method." I wish to distinguish at the outset two different and separable things that have been confused, (1) the term "project method" and (2) a certain educational program in which I have myself been much interested. This particular educational program interests me because it is my child. These two things, (1) and (2), began life as separate and distinct affairs. They got married, but the marriage did not prove a success, and they were later divorced, but not before some children (my grandchildren) were born and now live in India, Egypt, Canada, Scandinavia, etc.[2]
1. The term "Project Method." – This may have come into existence at several simultaneous places. I did not originate it. I thought for a while to marry it to my child (my educational program). So far as I know it was first used by David Snedden (professor of education in Teachers College, 1905-9, 1916-35; commissioner of education for Massachusetts 1909-16). I am not too sure, but as I understand Snedden's plan it was for agricultural education; he encouraged farm youth to undertake farm projects, and learn from them.[3] *I think he discussed no special theory in connection and had no thought of bringing it into the ordinary school work. Specifically, he rejected my educational ideas.*
My first clear acquaintance with the term (for I never heard of Snedden's use until the "marriage" had come about and was going on the rocks) was from an article on the "project method" by Professor Woodhull (professor of science teaching at Teachers College) about 1914.[4] *His idea was to have a science student make and install, say, an electric doorbell in his home. Again there was no special discussion of educational theory and no proposal to use the idea outside of science.*
About that time Professor Frank McMurry of Teachers College was advocating "the problem method" for teaching, say, in geography.[5] *The teaching was to assign a problem, e. g., How will the new Panama Canal affect South American trade? and the pupils would study out the answer from any available sources.*
[2.] *My own educational program. – For many years I had been seeking ways to enlist the self-directing interest and effort of pupils. I had experimented, on a very limited scale, in this direction in Blakely (Ga.) in 1892-95, in Savannah (Ga.) in 1895-96, in Columbus (Ga.) in 1906-007 (all the foregoing public schools) and in my college classes at Mercer University in 1897-1906. I had read Herbert Spencer on moral education ("natural punishment," really inherent educative effects of one's own behavior), William James's* Talks to Teachers *(his emphasis on character education and the moral effects of acting on thinking), but most of all Dewey's* Interest as Related to Will *(later rewritten as* Interest and Effort*). In this I saw that the act in its entirety includes interest as its internal and initiating aspect and effort as the outward and effecting aspect. Putting all these together, with Thorndike's laws of learning, I had come to the conclusion (i) that the best unit of school work is pupil purposeful activity, as wholehearted as can be got; (ii) that what is done in the prosecution of this wholehearted purposeful activity will, by Thorndike's laws of readiness, exercise and effect, be learned in the degree it is accepted as helping the activity towards its goal (the purpose of the learner) and learned as* not to be done *in the degree that it fails to help; (iii) I had further come to the conclusion that while the child is working interestedly on his purpose, there will arise attendant thoughts and feelings favorable to what interests him and unfavorable to what thwarts or hinders. These concomitant learnings accumulate into attitudes, conceptions, ideals, standards of work, principles of action, etc., and thus constitute perhaps the most valuable of all resulting learnings.*
With all this in mind I began looking for a name to give my child. I could not accept McMurry's "problem method" because it was intellectual only and so did not cover the whole ground as I thought my conception did. It was then that Woodhull's term "project method" came to my attention. According to the dictionary a project is something that is contemplated, devised, or planned. I thought this filled pretty well what I meant and I married my program to this term. The Teachers College Record *asked me to write an article giving my idea. I wrote* The "Project" Method, the Use of the Purposeful Act in the Educative Process. *In this article I wrote: "It is to this purposeful act with the emphasis on the word purpose that I myself apply the term 'project'. I did not invent the term nor did I start it on its*

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[2] For Kilpatrick's international connections see Brickman 1966.
[3] Cf. Snedden 1916. The idea of utilizing the project method in agricultural education originated not from Snedden, but from Rufus W. Stimson (1912), Snedden's agricultural advisor at the Massachusetts Board of Education.
[4] Kilpatrick probably alluded to Woodhull's essay "Science Teaching by Projects" of 1915.
[5] McMurry developed the "problem method" in *How We Study* (1909).

educational career. Indeed I do not know how long it had already been in use. … Others who were using the term seemed to me either to use it in a mechanical or partial sense or to be intending in a general way what I have tried to define more exactly. … The actual terminology with which to designate the concept is, as was said before, a matter of relatively small moment" (The editor dropped my quotation marks from the title of the article).

After my idea got well going (some 50,000 or 60,000 copies of the article [1918] were reprinted and it was translated into Russian and German), others began to protest that I was using the term "project method" in my way and not in theirs, that I had not originated the term and so had no right to use it. Others proceeded to use the term in their own peculiar ways. Some were good though different, as J. A. Stevenson's The Project Method of Teaching *(New York, Macmillan, 1921), but others absurd.*[6] *In the end I decided I had made a mistake to marry my program to the term, and I stopped using the term as being provocative and ambiguous.*

I believe now I have answered your original question. I have brought myself into the discussion more than might seem necessary. But I was back in the 20's irritated by the adverse discussions and felt like clearing up the whole matter.

Abroad in many countries the term "project method" is used, I think it but fair to say, to refer to my educational program on the method side. This began about 1923 with one of my missionary students in India where it had great vogue and was, I think, eventually absorbed into Gandhi's "Basic Education" revealing his ideas to fit modern conceptions. The last year of the Lincoln School two Egyptian students were sent to get what they could of the "project method" before the school should finally close down. They have been connected with a "project method" school in Cairo, fostered by the minister of education. I find the term "project method" used in Canada to refer to my educational idea.

Please pardon so lengthy a reply to your question.
Sincerely yours,[7]

Right at the beginning of his letter to Flexner, Kilpatrick makes a distinction that he had not made so clearly hitherto, namely that between word and content. He did not invent the expression "project" or "project method," he writes, but the definition and the notion of self-education and child-centered learning connected with the term were his genuine creation. This claim is correct, and is important for the understanding of the further course of the debate. For it was the combination of the familiar word with the new content that made a decisive contribution to the world-wide spread of project approach. In the US the project concept was by now under discussion all around, and thus did not need to be laboriously popularized. The label "method" appealed to teachers, principals, and school superintendents, because it promised to be a safe means for the solution of their teaching problems. The definition "wholehearted purposeful activity" suited the adherents of progressive education who, as followers of Comenius, Rousseau, and Herbart, were working energetically for "learning by doing," "learning through freedom," and "learning with interest" (cf. Kliebard 1986, Reese 2005). Kilpatrick recognized that this was a propitious moment. With a sure feeling for the topicality and clout of the concept, he saw in the project method the chance of making a name for himself.

Kilpatrick, it seems, was from the beginning in agreement with the postulates of the 19th century's "new education movement" which, led by Francis W. Parker, G. Stanley Hall, and William N. Hailmann, opposed the formalism, mechanism, and monotony of traditional teaching methods. As a young teacher, he told Flexner, he had already recognized that learning was most successful when the students "decide on their own activities" and are able to "pursue their intentions wholeheartedly." As we know from the present letter, but also from other sources, Kilpatrick found his pedagogical views confirmed above all by John Dewey and Edward L. Thorndike. His reception of their studies on the psychology of learning was intensive, and the two authors were – and remained – his heroes and most important models. In fact, in his first paper not dedicated to a topic from history or philosophy, Kilpatrick (1913) dealt with Dewey's booklet *Interest and Effort in Education*. In this short, three page, paper, titled "Dewey's Doctrine of Interest,"

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[6] Kilpatrick was infuriated by Charles A. McMurry's (1920) interpretation of the project method. See Kilpatrick 1921, 286f.

[7] Since the letter has only survived as carbon copy there is no signature.

Kilpatrick stressed how man is essentially an active being pursuing goals and "purposes" of his own. His "activities", as he paraphrased Dewey, were "propulsive" and "projective," and always had to be an affair of "the heart" and of "identification" – Dewey (1913, 7, 190, 183, 185) himself had spoken of "whole-hearted identification" – without which no thinking or learning could take place. Kilpatrick's essay of 1913 thus already contained the three keywords that moved him, five years later, to define the project as "wholehearted purposeful activity." Furthermore, the characterization of interest as "projective" may have contributed to making him receptive to the notion of "project" and the "project method."

Kilpatrick felt encouraged in his and Dewey's view that all school work should be "consciously wished" by Thorndike's book *The Psychology of Learning*, which also appeared in 1913 and which he promptly analysed carefully. Here, together with the famous "laws of learning," Thorndike substantiated – now from the behaviorist perspective – the view that "purpose" was the "most important" factor influencing the conduct, thought, and action of the individual. "Purposive thought or action is a series of varied reactions or 'multiple response'," Thorndike (1913, 51ff.) declared. "In purposive thinking and action, as everywhere else, bonds are selected and retained by satisfyingness, and are killed off by the discomfort which they produce." This statement of Thorndike's made a great impression on Kilpatrick, and he was to quote it later in his main work on project teaching, *Foundations of Method* (Kilpatrick 1925, 52).

Together with the writings of Dewey and Thorndike, Kilpatrick may have been won over by a third text of a quite different kind to take up the notion "project" and to connect it with the term "method." The essay "Principles Underlying the Organization of Kindergarten Materials" by Luella A. Palmer, the progressive supervisor on the New York City Board of Education, was a contribution to the special issue that appeared in January 1914 of Kilpatrick's home journal, the Teachers College Record, under the heading "Experimental Studies in Kindergarten Theory and Practice," and presenting the latest insights and research on early childhood education. Surely Kilpatrick read this issue as a preliminary to his studies on Froebel and Montessori, especially since it also contained important articles by Dewey and Patty Smith Hill, whose work as kindergarten specialist and colleague at Teachers College he revered. In her essay, which remains noteworthy even today, Luella Palmer distinguished between four teaching approaches: "experiment," "imitation," "repetition," and a method which she called – where it proceeds from the teacher – "suggestive" or – where it proceeds from the student – "purposive," to which she accorded the greater value, but also attested the greater risk of failure. "If the purposive method is never used," Palmer (1913, 55ff.) explained, "the material will never be organized upon the highest basis. A desirable end in view demands a child's best effort." "If this method should be used exclusively," she continued, thereby criticizing Kilpatrick's educational philosophy even before he had developed his project approach, "it would defeat its own object, the children would become discouraged and effort paralysed because they would be tasked to arrive at a result before they could control the means through which to attain it."

After two years of experimentation, Kilpatrick finally decided in spring 1917 in favor of the term "project method." He did not take the opportunity, which suggested itself, of simply speaking of "purposive method," as Luella Palmer had done. This phrase was evidently too colorless and unimpressive to be of service for his planned spectacular appearance on the educational stage. In his letter to Flexner, Kilpatrick mentions another alternative which, however, he soon rejected. The term "problem method," as developed educationally by Frank M. McMurry (1909), the Herbartian und colleague of Kilpatrick at Teachers College, in *How We Study*, and psychologically interpreted by John Dewey (1910) in *How We Think*, was not acceptable to Kilpatrick: the term "problem" was "intellectualistic," neglected the child's intrinsic motivation, and above all, due to its close connection with McMurry and Dewey, was not conducive to the self-profiling for which he was striving. In this dilemma, Kilpatrick temporarily used the formulation "problem-project," a term that was of course, owing to its indeterminateness, unable to satisfy him in the long term. The expression "project method," which he had found – as he wrote in the letter to Flexner – through the physicist of Teachers College, John F. Woodhull, was most suited to his idea, since it was fresh, catchy, and inspiring. Above all the term had the invaluable advantage of not yet having been adopted and systematically marketed by any educationalist of name.

On the one hand, his decision in favor of the term "project method" was, as previously indicated, smart and clever, but on the other hand highly problematical, as Kilpatrick was to encounter immediately and candidly. In contrast to his claim in his letter to Flexner, resistance to his choice of the term did not arise only after, but even before, the

publication of his 1918 essay. From another of Kilpatrick's letters about the origin of his project concept we know that Ernest Horn, Professor of Education at the University of Iowa and formerly principal of the Speyer School at Teachers College, had pointed out to him as early as April 1917 that the project method had long been firmly anchored in manual training and industrial arts, and could therefore not swiftly be transformed and arbitrarily redefined. Kilpatrick, after all a qualified historian, did not take Horn's observation as an occasion to deal seriously with the traditional usage and the earlier status of the project method within the progressive education, his reaction was instead defiant and dogmatic. His "conception of a purposeful unit of activity," he (1935) told Horn, "had a better claim to the name" than the students' enterprises in manual training and agricultural education. Nonetheless, Horn's blow had struck home, and continued to take effect, as can be seen by the long incubation period of his project essay. Kilpatrick had finished the 29-page manuscript "How Shall We View Method" criticized by Horn on 9 April 1917, but it took more than a year to revise the paper and prepare it for publication in the Teachers College Record. As his diary entries of the time show, he suffered more than ever from the labor of writing, and in the end was less satisfied than ever with the results of his work (cf. Tenenbaum 1951, 88f., 207f.). "Rough in many places," he recorded on 31 May 1918, the day he delivered the manuscript. "I am even apprehensive of the argument in spot."

The cause of his apprehension was evidently the justification of his choice of terms, a passage which was still missing in the manuscript of 1917. Indeed, in the introduction to his essay of 1918, Kilpatrick spent no less than two pages of print to back up the adoption of the familiar term for his radically new approach to teaching. Here, as also in his letter to Flexner, Kilpatrick (1918, 320f.) placed three arguments in the foreground: (1.) his predecessors – at this point he repeated his reply to Horn – had failed to develop a usable theory of project teaching, and therefore had no right to a monopoly of the concept and to decide exclusively about its application; (2.) the expression "project" had the colloquial meaning of "plan," "scheme," or "purpose," and was therefore well suited to characterize his educational philosophy; and (3.) terminological questions were in any case "a matter of relatively small moment;" what was imperative was after all the content, not the word connected with it. Kilpatrick's argumentation caused Boyd H. Bode, who was also a professed adherent of Dewey, to utter mordant criticism and to make a memorable proposal. "In the interests of our common undertaking," Bode (1927, 165) wrote in *Modern Educational Theories*, "it would be better to limit the term project to its original meaning of incidental learning or else to abstain for a time from talk about the project method." Having read Bode's book, Kilpatrick played down his own dismay. Bode, he noted in his diary on 5 February 1929, "has made certain criticisms of me which I am satisfied are founded but slightly." This small quantity was, at any rate, significant enough for him to take up Bode's proposal and to refrain henceforth from using the project concept. From the early 1930s, he – and, following him, most of his adherents – only spoke of "activities" when the students realized their own plans and ideas "heartily" and "purposefully."

Abandoning the term that had made him famous was a process that took place tacitly. Not until he was eighty years of age did Kilpatrick, the proud and honorable "southern gentleman," openly admit his face-about. In his letter to Flexner, he finally confessed – without naming any names – that he had accepted Bode's proposal and taken his advice. "In the end," he revealed to Flexner, "I decided I had made a mistake to marry my program to the term, and I stopped using the term as being provocative and ambiguous." Here Kilpatrick indulged in self-criticism that could not have been more fitting and at the same time crushing. Without a doubt, his definition of the project was "ambiguous," since it disregarded the conventions of the language in designating the subjective "attitude" of the student an objective "method" of instruction; and it was "provocative," for it ignored the traditions of the subjects, and – from a sheer wish for innovation and self-aggrandisement – replaced the precise definition of the project as "independent, constructive activity" by the vague phrase "whole-hearted purposeful activity." It was this break with tradition and convention, introduced unnecessarily and unreasonably by Kilpatrick, that aroused indignation among both friends and foes, caused utter confusion, and for a time plunged the project movement into a profound crisis.

Unfortunately, Kilpatrick accepted only his error in the choice of terms, and failed to see that he had also made a serious mistake in its conceptualization. His definition of the project made the student the master of his own learning process. Since each individual student was ideally to decide alone on all phases of the project, that is, to "purpose," "plan," "execute," and "judge" his project himself according to his "felt needs" of the moment, both the class, as

agency of socialization, and especially the teacher, as instructor and controller, lost their essential functions. According to Kilpatrick (1924, 908; 1925, 365ff.), the teacher was only to intervene when the students exploited their freedom anarchically, or lacked the will to learn the "minimal essentials" which – such as "reading, writing, and a little (very little) arithmetic" – were absolutely necessary for survival in a civilized society. In his "democracy of childhood," Kilpatrick (1918, 329f.) wrote, the teacher was to make himself as far as possible "superfluous" – indeed, to "eliminate" himself. And indeed the removal of compulsion and heteronomy was the highest goal and the decisive precondition for the "whole-hearted purposeful" learning by projects. The quality of a school, Kilpatrick (1929, 78) announced to the educational world, did not depend on the quantity of knowledge absorbed by the students, but on the degree of intrinsic motivation they were able to muster in class.

Kilpatrick was able to cite Dewey in support of his philosophy of freedom. In *The School and Society*, Dewey (1900, 23) had demanded a "revolution not unlike that introduced by Copernicus" in pedagogics, with the goal that the student should no longer have to revolve round the teacher, but on the contrary the teacher round the student and to serve him. Yet Kilpatrick failed to see that Dewey relativized, not to say abjured, his revolutionary demand, by propagating at the same time a "magic didactic triangle" which, together with the "psychological" (interests of the child) was to stress also the "sociological" (demands of society) and the "logical" (systematic organization of subject matter) as indispensable elements of successful teaching (Dewey 1897a, 84ff.; 1897b, 164ff.). In the revised edition of *How We Think*, Dewey (1933, 337f.) expressly resisted the "fallacious" notion that within the project the teacher was to abdicate his role as leader and his responsibility for the content and method of teaching to the students. It was, rather, the "office" of the teacher to plan the curriculum in such a way that, although proceeding from the "psychology" of the child, it led surely to the "logic" of the subject. Social progress was not to be achieved with a "minimalized" teacher and a "minimalized" lesson plan. It would have honored Kilpatrick, and made him a creditable pedagogue and a true disciple of Dewey, had he abandoned not only the project term but also his sentimental, child-centered program of education, and taken to heart the warning already uttered by Dewey (1897a, 93) in his "Pedagogic Creed," and which is still valid today – perhaps more than ever: "Next to deadness and dullness, formalism and routine, our education is threatened with no greater evil than sentimentalism."

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