

Teaching and Learning Methods Through the Ages

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This paper will cover Teaching and Learning Methods from the past and present. This will show that ideas toward teaching and concepts of learning in some ways have not changed much throughout the ages. According to our textbook *Foundation of Education* by Ornstein, et al (2017), it has been documented how the ancients taught as well as other scholars. This includes the Chinese, with Confucius, the Egyptian, the Hebraic, the Greek philosophers, and Roman. This examination moves forward through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, and into the Enlightenment period (pp. 47-83).

Starting with the ancient Chinese, they had three different philosophies: Legalism; Taoism; and Confucianism. Legalism was created by Shih Huang, a scholar of the Ch'in dynasty. "...legalists established an authoritarian government, which ruthlessly maintained order and used education to indoctrinate people on their beliefs" (p. 49). Lao Tzu a philosopher from the sixth century was credited with creating Taoism, which was considered more humane than Legalism. "In Taoism, education's purpose is to encourage the reflection needed to find one's true self and take the path to truth" (p. 49). Lao Tzu wanted his followers to not control others or events. He had the vision of people going with the flow of life, and yet enjoying its simplicity. Confucianism was accepted by the Han, when they came into power, in 207 BCE. Confucius felt "Education's major purpose is to create and maintain a harmonious society in which everyone clearly knows his or her status, duties, and responsibilities, and the appropriate way of behaving toward others" (p. 49). Even today, Confucianism is still important within the Asian culture. Students strive for excellence, and respect their teachers. Students learn via memorization rather than from lectures. Writing skills in calligraphy is extremely important for their success, even today.

The Egyptians and Greeks have histories that are entwined with one another, depending on whose research is being read. There is documentation that the Egyptians influenced the Greeks according to historian Martin Bernal, in the following ways: "...government, philosophy, the arts and sciences, and medicine..." (p. 54). Yet, western culture had a hard time accepting this, since the Egyptians were from North Africa, and many Western cultures had based their beliefs on the Greeks. The Egyptians taught

scribes to reproduce their written language of hieroglyphics, so that they could transcribed them onto papyrus scrolls, maintaining a documentation of their world.

In Hebraic education, children were taught “by listening, reading, and memorizing, students were expected to internalize the lesson’s meaning and message. To build group cohesion and identity, ...” (p. 56). As a group of people, they felt strongly about passing down their traditions and heritage from one generation to the next. They did that by teaching the old testament of the Bible, the Torah. The training started at a very early age and continued throughout their lives. In many Jewish communities, these customs are still carried on today.

The Greeks “...illustrate the power of education as narrative storytelling to transmit education” (p. 57). Depending on what part of Greece you were from, your education would vary accordingly. It also was different for boys versus girls in these different areas as well. “As a teacher, Socrates who believed in universal truths, asked leading questions that stimulated students to think deeply about and reflect on the meaning of life, truth, and justice” (p. 60). “Plato did not believe that men were intellectually superior to women. Both men and women should receive the education that was appropriate to their intellectual abilities” (p. 63). Plato was a student of Socrates. “Plato’s theory of knowledge is called reminiscence, a process by which individuals recall the ideas present but hidden within their minds” (p. 61). He believed that people drew from this stored knowledge. In contrast, Plato’s student, “Aristotle advocated the study of the liberal arts and sciences, which he believed enlarged a person’s knowledge and choices” (p. 64). Aristotle, as a realist, believed in teaching by using objects. These natural objects were broken down into three categories: animal, plant and mineral. He based his curriculum on object classification. This can be expanded to more distinct and specific areas of study. Consider how many different types of sciences that we have today. Yet, many people today do not see where the liberal arts, or vocational classes, help prepare students for employment. Industry is pairing with community colleges, and asking them to train employees, or perspective employees, to be better prepared especially in the career and technical arena.

Ancient Rome employed a type of home schooling for the sons of the patrician elite. These boys, learned from their fathers about family history, how to respect and honor their family duty, the state, and their gods. At the same time, lessons covered learning about self-control, the rights, rituals and prayers for their gods, as well as to fear them. They also were given military training. Toward the end of the fourth century, Rome introduced the primary school for boys ranging in age from 7 through 12. Literacy was important to them. These students then moved on to the Greek Grammar school that taught them: “composition, literature, poetry, and history” (p. 66), through the age of 16. Upper-class boys went on for even higher education at rhetorical schools that combined Greek concepts with Roman politics and law.

During the Middle Ages, it appeared that the Catholic church and various religions had great influence over education. Men dominated, and the women lost, as far as education was concerned. “Monastic schools trained monks either as priests or brothers in church doctrine, Latin, the rules (*the regala*) that governed their communities, and in reading, writing and mathematics” (p. 69). The only education available to women was through the convent, which consisted of: “...Latin, singing, reading and writing and what became the ‘women’s curriculum’ of embroidery, spinning, weaving, and painting” (p. 69). The Renaissance means rebirth. During this transitional time, which began in the fourteenth century, an educated person knew both Latin and Greek. This knowledge was present as late as the end of the nineteenth century, as part of the requirement for admission to colleges and universities, both here, and in Europe. Education did not dramatically increase during this period. Again, it showed that the privileged received more education than the common class, who in turn received more than the lower class, who may have only gotten a little education, if any, if they were lucky.

The Reformation brought about the release of the strong hold that the Catholic church had on education and “the Protestant Reformation gave renewed emphasis to the role of religion in education” (p. 81). Various religions then could have their own schools, and presented their own views to their pupils since these “...schools were and are sponsored by churches, temples, synagogues and mosques” (p. 81).

The people of The Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century both in Europe and over here were curious about and had new ideas they wanted to explore on teaching. Through observation and empirical data gathering, they watched children play as well as do projects and activities regarding the world around them. “Americans saw education as the key to success” (p. 81).

Another inspired individual was Johann Amos Comenius who lived during the post Reformation era. He felt that children needed to be treated with care and kindness. “He believed children learn most efficiently when they are developmentally ready to learn a particular skill or subject” (p. 88). Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s concepts were forerunners to constructivism. He wanted the students to understand the world in which they lived. Pestalozzi divided teaching into “general” and “special” areas. The general area was setting the groundwork for what was to follow, when dealing with the more specific teaching of objects. These were everyday items from nature: animals; plants; and rocks; or man-made things that were available at that time. With these items, the students were learning how to count; drawing taught them form; and they were taught the names for these objects. These skills transitioned to reading and writing exercises. Here we discover an educator talking about helping those who have special needs-- Herbart’s goal was to create a systematic approach to teaching. He created five steps which were: preparation, presentation, association, generalization and application (pp. 97-98). This sounds very much like an early forerunner to the instructional models used today.

We credit Friedrich Froebel for creating kindergarten. Froebel, a student of Pestalozzi, took his objects to be more symbolic, and thus inspired recall. “The curriculum included what Froebel called *gifts*, or objects with fixed form, such as spheres, cubes, and cylinders, intended to bring to consciousness the underlying concept represented by the object” (pp.99-100). Another pioneer is Herbert Spencer who wanted to stop teaching the classics, and be innovative, thereby promoting engineering and applied technology, along with the different sciences of biology, social science and physical science. This was happening in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was influenced by Darwinism. John Dewey is considered a pioneering experimentalist. “In 1896, Dewey established his Laboratory School at

the University of Chicago... He called the school a 'miniature society' and an 'embryonic community,' in which children learn collaboratively by working together to solve problems" (p. 104). Continuing with Dewey, problem solving as part of the scientific method, became a key factor in his school's curriculum and was highly effective. Dewey's influence is a step forward to the hands-on approach used in many classes today. It helped to reform social change in education.

Jane Addams targeted immigrant women for education. "Addams wanted public schools to feature a multicultural curriculum that included the history, customs, songs, crafts, and stories of ethnic and racial groups" (p. 108). This multi culture mix could be said of our society and classes of today. Just as we are being taught in college now, Addams was creating a sense of community then, with her own students. We are presently trying to connect to our vast communities that come together in our physical classrooms, and around the world via online classes, over the Internet. Maria Montessori also broke barriers. She was the first Italian woman to receive a medical degree. Taking that knowledge, and working with mentally or impaired children, she created ways to bring out their needs to succeed. Her curriculum was based on these areas: practical life experiences; sensory acuity; as well as muscle and physical development activities; and formal skills that included studying. Her work continues today with twenty thousand schools worldwide, where 6000 are in the United States.

Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist "...discovered that children construct their concepts about reality by actively exploring their environment" (p.112). He felt that children should be left to learn on their own in an informal setting, rather than a structured environment at school. In this way, children are more aware of their surroundings, and are constantly gathering information that they may need now or store away to use later. This is a precursor to the later theory of constructivism. Piaget is also known for his cognitivism which is waking up the mind. These two theories merge into the activity of problem solving by applying critical thinking.

Paulo "Freire worked to transform teaching and learning from the limited concept of transmitting

information to engaging the project of completing one's identity and meaning in a world that needs to be made more equitable, humane and just" (p. 117). He was a firm believer that teachers needed to understand the background in which their students lived. This information may impact the schools they attend. This will help the teachers to help their students deal with the situations within their communities.

Still as colonies, our country was beginning, so was the need for education. There were numerous areas and influences that played major roles in how education was taught. Much had a religious overtone. In Puritan New England, they patterned the school system after what was known in Europe. They created the Town School and the Latin Grammar School as the higher level of education for the upper-class boys. While the areas of New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania created more the parochial type of schools, based around the various beliefs and religions of that Mid Atlantic area. Going farther south to encompass Maryland, Virginia, both Carolinas, and Georgia—they were more rural, where it was more difficult to create local schools. Depending on the circumstances, wealthier families may have brought in a tutor, or sent children away to school. However, the slaves of the South were kept uneducated, except a few enterprising ones did learn to read and write without formal training.

After the Revolutionary War ended, our fore fathers had to create a new educational system that would reflect this new country. Benjamin Franklin "recognized how important science, invention, and technology would be to America's future. His curriculum featured the useful skills the schools had traditionally ignored, such as carpentry, shipbuilding, engraving, printing, and farming" (p. 128). He created an academy, of secondary education that was along the lines of daily useful information and science versus what was taught at the Latin Grammar schools. Thomas Jefferson was "Committed to separation of church and state, he believed that the state, not the churches, had the primary educational role" (p. 129). A contemporary of Jefferson's is Benjamin Rush. Rush was against the separation of church and state. He also believed that women should be educated, since they had intellects equal to men. He went so far as "he proposed a system of academies and colleges for women" (p.130). Noah Webster took things a step farther, to have this country have its own version of English, giving us our own

identity. Webster authored numerous textbooks realizing that they were a valuable teaching tool for reading and spelling. He became known as the “schoolmaster of the republic” (p. 131).

Sunday schools played a part to educate the working youth of the early nineteenth century. This was when our country was becoming industrialized in the east. As the public-school systems started to be established, then, Sunday schools took on a more religious over tone. Joseph Lancaster adopted the British monitorial educational style to teach the basic subjects of “reading, spelling and arithmetic” (p.131) to a big group of learners. This method of teaching had the older students, who had mastered these skills, teach and tutor the younger learners. This was accomplished in the larger populated areas.

The common school started in the first half of the nineteenth century. The reason for the name was that it was open to all children, no matter background or status. It relied on public money, and community control. However, the South did not use this method until after the Civil War. Common schools were the forerunner to the normal schools, which trained teachers to be teachers. With that established, women were then allowed to pursue a teaching career. One of the pioneers for women in the nineteenth century was Catherine Beecher. In the rural areas, many classrooms were one large room for all grades. Textbook needs grew as the school population swelled. College professor William Holmes McGuffey, who was also a clergyman, rose to the challenge, and created a series of books known as the McGuffey Readers. These books stressed pride in our country, literacy, how hard work was rewarding through diligence and punctuality. These books were used from 1836 through 1920.

Franklin’s idea of the academy expanded. By 1855, these academies had grown to over 6000 with an enrollment of 263,000 learners. They are considered the stepping stones toward our high schools of today. These academies were not limited to only boys; some were for girls, while others were for both. Some were privately run, while others received state and local funding, making them semipublic. Today there still are some private academies; yet, only a small part of the population attends these schools. Our current high schools began strongly by the 1870s. The enrollment in these public high schools outnumbered the academies by two to one, by 1890. “Whereas liberal arts and science college professors

saw them as college-preparatory institutions, vocational educators wanted high schools to prepare adolescents to enter the work force” (p. 141). Our colonies started the first colleges and universities which again were tied into religion. Harvard started in 1636, Yale 1754 as well as William and Mary, and what is now known as Columbia. Their curriculum was very much into the classics of languages, philosophy, logic and ethics, plus other studies.

The United States is a nation of immigrants. As our country increased, so did the influx of more people coming from around the world, to live and work here. This created problems within the educational system, because of the varying backgrounds, cultures and languages that had to be considered. There were other people, like the Native Americans, who were here first, and the African Americans who had been brought here as slaves, but never educated formally. Booker T. Washington had the opportunity to bend the curriculum to how he thought best, at Tuskegee where he had been appointed principal by the Alabama state legislature. W. E. B. Du Bois is credited with helping to organize the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). “Du Bois was adamant that a person’s career should be determined by ability and choice, not by racial stereotyping” (p. 149). The Native American “Children learned skills, social roles, and cultural patterns from their group’s oral tradition, from parents and elders, and from direct experience with tribal life” (p. 150). Since the Latino community is comprised of many different cultures within it, it is hard to just pin down one general item regarding learning or methods of teaching. What does surface is that bilingual ability or teaching seems to be a common thread. “...bilingual education has become politically controversial, with some states making English the official language” (p. 154). The Asian American were segregated from enjoying the public-school system for decades. If the students went to school it was one based on their specific language, culture and traditions. The Arab Americans faced similar challenges that the other immigrant groups did. These people were assimilated into the American culture; yet, they also retain their Arabic roots.

Recent history in our school system, showed the “basic education movement” (p. 157) of the 1970s that nationally there was a decline in standards in skills, and the academic subjects being offered. In the 1980s, Secretary of Education Bell, under President Reagan, created a three-step plan to raise the standards: “(1) a basic skill and subject matter curriculum; (2) effective schools with high academic standards and expectations; and (3) education to improve American economic competition in the global economy” (p. 157). Then, in 2001 our Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act that lasted until 2014. It required too much testing in grades 3-8 which were testing on math and reading skills. This became a state curriculum and testing effort, not a national one. Teachers did not like it, and many stated they were only “teaching the test” (p. 158). Students were memorizing material, not learning how to think for themselves, nor how to solve problems. Ending with the issue of today’s Common Core is a question that many people discuss, and not all are tied into education. “The authors of the (Common Core) Standards asserted that they were developed to ensure that American students were competent in skills and subjects related to literacy (such as reading) and mathematics (for example, algebra), ready for college and prepared to compete in a global economy” (p. 157). It sounded good, but when left to the states to implement, much stayed as before with little change. Obama pushed his Race To The Top (RTTT) agenda in 2009, which had a budget of \$4.35 billion to adopt the educational standards. In this way, our students would be able to attend college, and/or be ready to go to work when they graduated high school. So, states were being nudged to use the Common Core Standards.

What has been evident, for years, in college classes that I have taught, many students are not well equipped to be in college, nor are they ready to enter the workforce. Many cannot read well, writing and spelling is equivalent to early elementary school student work, and math is at the very basic level. Some students come to class who have never even worked on a computer; yet, mysteriously, they know how to use their cell phones.

It is said that history repeats itself; and, having written about the learning and teaching methods throughout the ages, this is true here. Things may be slightly different with the progress of technology.

However, many of these great thinkers and inventors had similar ideas as to what is being taught today. The teaching methods and learning styles are changing too as technology is giving us abilities that past educators could never have imagined. Think of how the Internet is allowing us to create a community of inquiry in a class without us being together. We can have learners globally sharing ideas, experiences and information all at the same time.

Reference

Ornstein, Allan C., et al, (2017). *Foundation of Education* 13th edition. Canada: Cengage Learning.