

Influential Educators and Their Impact
on Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
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Abstract

In this paper, four influential educators will be discussed. The important theories Maria Montessori, Mary Wollstonecraft, Paolo Freire, and Howard Gardner will be described. Also, their effect on the curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the elementary classroom will be discussed. The influence of these theories on contemporary issues of standards, accountability, and equal opportunity will be considered. Five empirical studies will also be discussed. Some of these studies discuss grouping strategies in the elementary classroom for gifted students, reading instruction, low ability students, and students with learning disabilities. Other studies discussed school scheduling and increasing student achievement. Finally, observations in ESL, gifted, and summer school classroom environments have been carried out. Similarities and differences among the three populations and classroom practices will be discussed. For more information about these three populations, please see Appendix A. These educators, studies, and observations have helped in the formulation of personal goals, floor plans, and classroom schedule.

This paper represents the importance of theory, practice, and research. Each is important to the success of both new and experienced teachers. Without research, teachers are not equipped with helpful new information about classrooms that could have a positive effect themselves and their students. Without practice, teachers must constantly rediscover the same common practices to deal with common classroom issues. They also may not comprehend the complexity of these tasks. Theory helps to shape and inform our thoughts and ideas about practice and research, and to discover new ways of thinking.

The integration of the three allows us to make informed decisions when formulating curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori spent the majority of her life studying the development of human beings, specifically in children and young adults. After a successful medical career, she began to study pedagogy and philosophy. She did much of her observation on children living in a reclaimed housing project in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. Her techniques were very successful, even more so that the traditional education of the time (Lillard, 1996).

Throughout her life, she performed ongoing research to explore human development. As she synthesized her work, the foundations of Montessori education came to fruition. One important idea was that human development occurs in formative planes (Lillard, 1996). The first plane of development covers the time from birth to age six. In this plane, children are concerned with their development as an individual. A child does this through sensory experiences. Children “absorb” a lot of information about their environment, both consciously and unconsciously (Lillard, 1996, p. 24). In the second plane of development, which occurs from ages six through twelve, children are more concerned with their social development. Children constantly ask questions about the world, can begin to reason abstractly, and also begin to develop moral sensibility (Lillard, 1996).

From ages 12 through 18, children are in the third plane of development. During adolescence, teenagers begin to learn about the effects of society for themselves and other people. They begin to explore their realities, in terms of nature and the human world.

Montessori describes the goal of this plane as a search to develop a sense of worth and strength (Lillard, 1996). In the fourth plane of development, from ages 18 through 24, students become “specialized explorers,” and begin work towards a particular profession. This only occurs if students have progressed successfully through the first three planes of development (Lillard, 1996, p.171).

Impact on K-6 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Montessori education is becoming more popular, and many more parents are properly educated on the subject. Montessori’s development of different goals of education has created the necessity for different methods of curriculum, instruction and assessment. First, the development of a curriculum for children is radically different than traditional public education. Montessori’s elementary curriculum also includes lessons in morality, grace and courtesy (Lillard, 1996). Along with these, students are also immersed in a curriculum that includes the standard public school subjects (Lillard, 1996). Methods of assessment are also different in Montessori schools. Students still take standardized tests. However, teachers review the test with children question by question to help them identify areas where they may need improvement (Lillard, 1996).

Contemporary Issues

Montessori’s methods are in direct alignment with the our goals for American children. In 1994, Congress adopted eight goals for the American educational system. Her educational plan for children under age six has allowed for some children to reach goal one, which states that “all children in American will start school ready to learn.” (Lemlech, 2006, p. 10). Montessori also believed that parental involvement was very important to a child’s success. Parent education classes are offered by all Montessori

schools to teach parents how to aid in their children's development (Lillard, 1996). This directly influences goal eight, which states that "every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children." (Lemlech, 2006, p.11). As Montessori education becomes more popular in the public sector, these methods could help to overcome some of the educational challenges that our society face.

Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft was a major proponent for childhood education and female advancement. In her first writing on education, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, written in 1786, Mary discussed the importance of the environment on the development of a child. However, the main idea of this book concerned female education. She discussed the need for women to attend to themselves as rational creatures before entering motherhood. Rational women will become rational mothers, who will create daughters that will imitate and unconsciously learn from their mothers' rational behaviors. Mary also discussed the need for moral, social, and intellectual development of the mind, to help women combat their low and demeaning social standing. It was her belief that possession of a rational mind would help improve this for women, despite the small range of female occupations to be had (Ferguson & Todd, 1984).

In 1787, Wollstonecraft wrote *Original Stories from Real Life*, a fictional book of moral stories mainly for children. This book was inspired by Wollstonecraft's experiences as a governess in Ireland. She found that the children needed to stop imitating their parents' bad behaviors. She decided that teaching by questioning was the best way to help students develop morality, reason, independence, philanthropy, and

assertiveness (Ferguson & Todd, 1984). Some of the stories in this book were directed to women, and reminded them that marriage was not their only option, and brainstormed new and different occupation for women (Ferguson & Todd, 1984, p.18).

In 1790, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, in response to Edmund Burke's *Reflection on the Revolution in France*. In her next book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft expressed major points concerning education for women and children. She strongly advocated for the rights of women, including education, so as to "render them beings worthy of respect or at least immune to prejudice" (Ferguson & Todd, 1984, p.67). She believed that education would allow women to support themselves or to become effective wives and mothers. Education, in her opinion, would allow women to be shown as equal to men, and allow for the advance of society (Ferguson & Todd, 1984).

Impact on K-6 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Wollstonecraft's idea of universal coeducation would have had a major effect on the elementary education of the day. Girls under the age of nine would participate in the same educational program. This program included reading, writing, mathematics, religion, history, and politics (Sotiropoulos, 2007). Educating girls and boys in the same subjects and assuming that they have similar mental capacities were revolutionary ideas in the 18th century. Under her plan, some children would still receive vocational training according to gender after the age of nine. However, if the children were found to be of "superior ability," they would go on in their education regardless of gender (Ferguson & Todd, 1984, p.20). This opened the door for girls to be considered equal to men. Wollstonecraft contended that "boys and girls possess the same nature and should

therefore be educated much more soundly and equitably” (Ferguson & Todd, 1984, p.19-20). This would mean that children of both genders would be taught and assessed in the same way.

Contemporary Issues

Overall, Mary Wollstonecraft believed in equality in education for all. This relates to the current issue of gender equity. Currently, students are still experiencing gender bias in the classroom. They experience this through the way they are treated by teachers, the curriculum, and instructional materials (Lemlech, 2006). For example, people still assume that females will shy away from mathematics and science, and that males will not enjoy language arts (Lemlech, 2006). To allow for gender equity, it is necessary that all students are provided with the same opportunities. However, because of the stereotypes mentioned above and other biases, this is not a reality (Lemlech, 2006). It is necessary to consider Wollstonecraft’s theories to combat gender equity issues.

Paolo Freire

Paolo Friere is a Brazilian educator who is most known for his liberation pedagogy. It was very important to him that knowledge was used to encourage curiosity and action in the masses of the oppressed (Walcott, 2007). The main vehicle for his pedagogy was *conscientizacao*. When translated, this means “awareness or critical consciousness.” Freire uses this term to describe the process of learning to “perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Walcott, 2007, p.73).

Freire firmly believed in a cycle of learning, where learners must also teach, and teachers must learn. He was of the opinion that if a teacher will not learn from his or her

students, it is the result of an “ideology of domination,” and that it is necessary for teachers to “learn how to continue to learn.” (Walcott, 2007, p.74). This lack of the cycle of learning is part of Freire’s larger theory of “banking education.” In this system of banking education, teachers give students information, and students are merely “depositories” for this information. Students are made to memorize facts, without understanding the significance of them. Since teachers are constantly disseminating information, they are regarded as experts, while students are seen as ignorant. This view does not allow for knowledge to be gained through curiosity and inquiry, and creates an ideology of oppression in the classroom (Freire, 1993).

Contemporary Issues and Impact on Education

In this age of accountability, it is very easy to fall into the trap of banking education. Accountability is one of the major issues of this era (Lemlech, 2006). Schools are required to show that they are making “adequate yearly progress.” Schools that cannot show this have their funding cut (Lemlech, 2006, p.12). Naturally, the pressure to improve test scores is mostly exacted onto the teachers, and teachers resort to teaching to the test. Teachers are held accountable for the success or failure of each child in their classroom (Lemlech, 2006). Teaching to the test is the same as banking education, and could have a negative effect on our children.

Other issues that are addressed by Freire’s pedagogy are the idea of multicultural education, and minority education. In the past, the curriculum was centered around Western civilizations, Christianity, and White males (Lemlech, 2006). Freire would categorize this as a part of imperialist domination. Without knowledge of other peoples and issues in the world, the “oppressors” can impose their narrow view of the world onto

the oppressed (Walcott, 2007). Historically, minorities have been oppressed in this country. That has since changed, and multicultural topics are now being included in some curricula. However, this is still a sensitive issue. It is becoming increasingly difficult to include everything in the curriculum, and some things must be excluded. Nevertheless, Freire's ideas have helped us to become more sensitive to the necessity of multicultural education.

Howard Gardner

Howard Gardner is famous for the theory of multiple intelligence. He defines an intelligence as “the biophysical potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture” (Gardner, 1999, p.33). Gardner outlines seven intelligences. Linguistic intelligence is the understanding of spoken and written languages, the ability to learn different languages, and the use of language to accomplish goals. Logical-mathematical intelligence is the ability to logically analyze problems, do mathematics, and conduct scientific investigations. Musical intelligence is the performance, creation, and appreciation of musical patterns. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is the ability to use the body to solve problems or create products. Spatial intelligence is the ability to understand and manipulate space. Interpersonal intelligence can be defined as the ability to understand people and to work well with them. Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to understand oneself (Gardner, 1999). These intelligences can be present in people in varying levels and combinations (Gardner, 1999, p.45).

Gardner also discusses the possibility of the use of multiple intelligence theory in schools. He outlined ways for teachers to create an environment that fosters multiple

intelligences, and practices for schools to implement that are inspired by multiple intelligence theory. Gardner tells us that almost any school can be reconfigured to use multiple intelligence theory, with the exception of the uniform school. The uniform school operates on the premise that all children should be treated the same way. Children are taught and assessed in the same way. The differences among children are not appreciated in this system (Gardner, 1999). Gardner suggests the option of individually configured education to combat this issue. This technique allows for different educational processes to serve different students equally. He also discusses ways to use this technique in large classrooms, and how technology can facilitate the use of this technique in the classroom (Gardner, 1999).

Impact on K-6 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Multiple intelligences theory has had a growing effect on elementary education in recent years. Schools are now becoming more sensitive to the different aptitudes of their students. Gardner calls attention to two schools in the United States who have successfully used multiple intelligences in their curriculum. At the Key School in Indianapolis, students do not solely participate in the traditional subjects of math, science, and language arts. Music, foreign language, and physical education are a part of the daily schedule. Students visit a “flow room” every day, where they can engage their wide ranges of interests. Common interests are explored by the children in groups called “pods”. The Key School was the first Multiple Intelligences school in the country, and has had a worldwide impact (Gardner, 1999). Educators nationwide have been able to use this theory in the designing of their curricula and lessons (Gardner, 1999).

Contemporary Issues

The theory of multiple intelligences is very relevant to some of the current issues that we face in education. One of these issues is society's expectation of its children. These expectations surely affect the standards that are put into place. Goals five and six from the aforementioned national goals state that "American students will be the first in the world in mathematics and science achievement," and "every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" (Lemlech, 2006, p.11). The standards reflect this as well. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that all states present detailed plans devised to improve guarantee that all students will be proficient in academic subjects by the 2013-2014 school year (Lemlech, 2006). This piece of legislation states: "The State shall have such academic standards ... in subjects determined by the State, but including at least mathematics, reading or language arts, and (beginning in the 2005-2006 school year) science, which shall include the same knowledge, skills, and levels of achievement expected of all children." (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2002). NCLB only provides for two types of intelligence – linguistic and logical-mathematical. There are five more intelligences in which a student can be proficient that are not accounted for under NCLB. Therefore, a child could be extremely intelligence, and still be classified as a low-achieving student.

Personal Goals

The theories of these four educators have helped me to formulate some goals that I would like to achieve when I begin teaching. One of the most important goals that I have is not to participate in banking education. I would like to make information real for my students. One of the issues created by banking education is that "the teacher is the

Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.” (Freire, 1993, p.73).

This can be detrimental to the student. Parker Palmer tells us that the information should be the subject and center of the classroom, not the teacher or the student (Palmer, 2007). I plan to use this in my classroom, as it is part of my educational philosophy.

I have been further inspired by Gardner to recognize other forms of intelligence in the classroom. In middle school, I had the pleasure of attending a school that allowed for the use of multiple intelligence theory to a certain extent. While the school did not employ the theory to the fullest extent, it allowed for other intelligences besides linguistic and logical-mathematical to be stimulated. I believe that this helped me to be more creative and successful in high school. As a teacher, I want to give students similar opportunities.

Maria Montessori’s theories on child development remind me that children may not develop as outlined by traditional education. When I become a teacher, I hope to remember this, and foster children’s abilities according to the planes of development. My last goal for teaching was inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft. It is easy to believe that boys are destined to have discipline problems, and girls are timid. When I begin to teach, I want to treat all children in the same way, regardless of my preconceived notions. The following research has helped me to formulate more goals concerning classroom set-up, and ability grouping.

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