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## Curriculum Through the Ages

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## *Curriculum Through the Ages*

By: Yehudis Schwartz

Education has always been an important mechanism of human survival. Throughout the ages it was used as a way to transmit important information from one generation to the next. Over the years however, the information that was important to transmit has changed drastically. In each generation, new things have become important for human survival. In ancient times, particularly during the Middle Ages the main subject that was taught was religion. In colonial times there was a still some emphasis on religion but it was in addition to the three R's; reading, writing and arithmetic. Later on in American history in the late 1900's education became very organized with little attention given to religion at all. Today in America there is much controversy about bringing religion into public schools at all. However there are new subjects that are taught to keep the students up to date with information they need to live in today's world.

Ched During the Medieval Period education was not very strong in the way that we perceive education today. During the 1330's only about 5% percent of the population was being educated at all (Lost Kingdom). Most of the education at that time was coming from the Catholic Church (Ornstein, Levine, 7). Both primary schools and secondary schools were run primarily by the church and therefore where teaching primarily religious subjects (Lost Kingdom). The group of people with the most education were people who worked in the church and lived in monasteries, like nuns and monks. The educational curriculum was completely

made up by the church, which allowed them to convince everyone to follow their teachings because they did not know anything else (Ibid). Institutions of the church taught language and the arts but did not focus much on science (Ibid). Early education started at home and was mostly informal serf children would go out with their parents to the field and learn about all the tasks they would need to survive in their position (Ibid). Children of the merchants and craftsmen would learn the trade of their father at a very early age, keeping trade secrets in a family for generations (Ibid). Young children of nobles had a different life entirely, the boys would learn hunting and how to use a weapon and the girls would learn how to cook (Ibid). Over all, other than the teachings of the church children were taught by their parents what was needed for survival in their place in society?

In colonial America, late 17th early 18th century, education was far from what it is today. Many of the first colonists particularly in New England were Puritans and therefore the education was largely for religious reasons (Aichin). There were different levels of education based on class ranking particularly in the south, different things were learnt depending on your place in society (Ibid). Education began at home where children were taught to respect their parents and say there prayers (Ibid). Girls at this time were entirely educated at home and where they learned everything they needed to know to be a good wife and mother as well as obedience to males. (Ibid) There was little or

no paper available and lessons were recited and memorized.

The upper class boys, mostly sons of wealthy plantation owners in the south, were educated at home. A private male tutor would teach them a variety of subjects including "higher math, Greek, Latin, science, celestial navigation, geography, history, fencing, social etiquette, and plantation management" (Stratford Hall). This was all preparation for a higher education in college or university (Aichin). Many wealthy plantation owners sent their sons to boarding schools in England and some even stayed on to learn medicine or law. Upper class girls were taught by a governess reading, writing and arithmetic for the purpose of reading the Bible and recording the expenses of the house hold (Stratford Hall). They also learned proper etiquette, art and music. Aside from that they learned practical household skills like "needlework, spinning, weaving, cooking, and nursing" and did not go on to higher education (Ibid).

Middle class located mainly in New England, included merchants, ministers, doctors and lawyers, their sons were educated as well but they were educated in schools outside the home (Aichin). From the ages of five to seven, they were sent to dame schools, a school run by an educated woman in her house for a small fee (Ibid). At the dame school the boys were taught to read and write, they were also taught good behavior (Ibid). After Dame school they went to elementary school, from seven to ten, where there was a strong emphasis on religion (Ibid). The children would begin to learn Latin, first the parts of speech like nouns and verbs and then the next year they would work on grammar and sentence structure (Ibid). After this they

worked on translating from English to Latin and vice versa as well as basic mathematics (Ibid). From here the boys continued onto Grammar school where they continued to learn math, English, and Latin. They had lesson classical literature as well (Ibid). From here some boys would continue onto university while others attended private venture schools to learn about commerce or a trade (Webb). The lower class at this time had little opportunity for education other than apprenticeships for some of the boys, and slaves got absolutely no education at all (Aichin).

Later on in American history in the 1960's school had become so formal that there was a movement to reform education (Gelbrich). Instead of teaching strait from the textbook, teachers were encouraged to make learning more exciting for the students. Students were given more choices with flexible schedules and more, but this experiment failed (Ibid). At this time people were complaining that the difficult time the United States was having economically was due to the fact that there were not enough engineers and scientists and that this was because the student's creativity was being suppressed (Cuban). The idea of how to fix this problem was called open classroom, an idea that was picked from Britain where this idea began after World War II (Ibid). The purpose was for the students to experience the education rather than being taught it formally, in a desk, by a teacher (Ibid). Therefore there was no set curriculum in these open classroom. Rather the classroom was set up in a way where there were centers of different things that might interest the children and at the same time create a learning experience (Ibid). The teacher's job was to help the students experience each

center and learn from it. The centers included all of the usual subjects like reading, math, science, and art (Ibid). After about a decade educators realized that instead of progressing with open classrooms, academic standards fell and violence rose in urban schools (Ibid). With this realization education began to revert back to the classic classroom with teachers in front of students sitting in desks (Ibid).

Today schools are still teaching the three R's because they are and always will be essential to the survival of the educated person. In 2016 though, there are many new things that need to be leant as well to educate in the world as it is now. Computers skills for example are crucial to for every educated person to know how to use. Today one cannot get a job without using a computer to first send in a resume. For many jobs proficiency in typing is a must because paper is slowly becoming obsolete. In comparison to the medieval times education has vastly improved, the subject matter is far more relevant to educating students then what was taught in medieval times. However in comparison to colonial age there are somethings that were stressed in education that have been lost in our educational system. Obedience and respect are hard to come by in the classroom and in colonial times this was something that was taught and upheld strongly. American society today would benefit from education in respecting elders. Part of this decline comes from the fact that American public schools do not touch on religion so as not to make any one feel uncomfortable. This was coming from a good place, but without religion, it is hard to define a set of morals and that is sorely missing in today's education in public schools. In comparison to the 1960's we have swung

back around somewhat and again teachers are trying to impart education in an interesting and creative way but desks have remained in the classroom and teachers in most cases still stand in the front and teach. It seems that in this area we have come to a good compromise, not overly rigid, but not too open either.

Today a new curriculum, called "Common Core," is being implemented with much controversy surrounding it (Common Core). The purpose is to create a nation standard for students all over America (Ibid). It is designed to have students of each grade come out with a certain standard of knowledge in each grade (Ibid). For example in the area of language arts, they are moving away from focusing just on reading and writing (Ibid). They want to gradually increase the complexity of the reading level so that every student comes out of high school ready to read on college and career-levels (Ibid). They also focus on increasing student's vocabulary and it is considered its own subject, students learn about the different nuances of different words and phrases (Ibid). Only time will tell if Common Core Curriculum will be successful and will be implemented for many years to come.

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