

Professional Portfolio on Innovation and Learning

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INTRODUCTION

In my study of *Innovation in Teaching and Learning*, I have come to the understanding that many innovative ideas and practices are in fact, not new at all. While they are novel to me, most have historical roots that go back to the late 19th century. As I progressed through each module, I came to understand that many of these innovative ideas have many negative assumptions surrounding them because they have either not been widely adopted, or because of the unfavorable attitudes associated with them. Through my study of philosophical foundations, I have confirmed by belief of the importance education is a moral endeavor and as an educator, innovation is an ethical practice, and an essential principle in both teaching and learning and a driving force behind my professional practice.

“An innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual ... If the idea seems new to the individual, it is an innovation”
(Rogers, 1983).

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

HISTORY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Kliebard’s *Why History of Education?* examines the significance of studying the history of education as there is value to the ideas and practices of the past. In order to be innovative, it is important to look at the results of these experiences and move away from them in order to see them in a new light. He examines three assumptions embedded in current curriculum thought and argues that these need be abandoned in order to progress.

“The lesson of history of education invites us to reinterpret old questions and sometimes cast them aside in order to pave the way for new ones”
(Kliebard, 1995).

However, this has proven to be a challenge, as these norms have become habits that are ingrained in contemporary attitude. The three conventions that we need to “get over “ in order to transform are: the objectives of schooling, preparing children for their adult lives and how to meet student needs.

The first question to “get-over” is the necessity to set goals when planning curriculum. Kliebard suggests that goal setting should not have a definitive end where students meet outcomes. Rather, students engage in an activity and move forward from there with *an end - in - view* as Dewey called it. During this process, students will need to change directions based on new outlooks or problems that may arise.

The second assumption to abandon is the idea that the purpose of education is to prepare students for adult life. To help students prepare for the future, education must “stimulate and refine their cognitive processes and give them a sense of efficacy in the world they now inhabit” by engaging them now. School should not be a place where students do their time, until they become adults as this does very little to enrich their lives in the present.

“Historically, the assumption of education was simply to prepare children for what lies ahead so they can be full functioning adults”
(Kliebard, 1995).

The final belief to leave behind is the one that schools, alone, can meet the common and individual needs of students. According to Kliebard this is unreasonable as it gives schools a responsibility that they cannot accomplish. Rather, in order to be effective in helping students, this responsibility should be shared with other socializing groups.

The problem with current curriculum thought is that there is too much going on, that nothing

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is being done well. There needs to be a stronger focus on the student's intellectual development and abandonment of old assumptions that have proven to be ineffective. However, these rituals have become so embedded in teaching and learning, that to reject them would be too strange for most. In order to be innovative and provide the best opportunities for our students, we need to be cognizant of what has been attempted in the past and engage students by enriching their lives in the present, not just their future.

Cuban's *Can Historians Help School Reformers?* describes the three types of historians and discusses how they use history to influence policy makers. While some use their understanding of history to help define contemporary social issues, others alter history to fit their agenda. Of the three, Cuban favours the Policy Sensitive and Non-Policy Historians as their conclusions are grounded in facts and evidence. Policy Sensitive Historians find solutions from the past to fit current policies, and Non-Policy Historians do not consider current policy in their study of the past. Presentists, on the other hand, look for meaning in contemporary issues by distorting history. Cuban heavily criticizes this group as they consider a bias history and ignore previous explanations and alternatives.

Cuban highlights that education as a process of individual and social improvement, and when considering the future and reform, it is important to study Policy Sensitive and Non-Policy Histories prescriptions. However, historians can only help reformers if they are willing to be open minded and abandon their assumptions of the past. It is important to see how education has progressed when considering where it should go in the future. In this context, history informs policy and innovation, and provides better understanding with respects the needs for teaching and learning.

HISTORICAL THINKING

Broom's *History from a Philosophic Perspective* investigates the meaning of history by examining archaeologist, historian and philosopher Robin George Collingwood's work and how to incorporate modern thought into his philosophy. The controlling idea is the need for change in how students gain knowledge. Teaching is not just about imparting facts, nor is learning simply the acquisition of knowledge. This idea does little to develop deepened understandings, reflective thought, and new perspectives; all of which are necessary for positive change. Collingwood's philosophy about the importance of history is that it is a holistic subject and a form of inquiry; both an art and a science. It is not to say that the study of history is not important; rather knowledge of the past can inform us of the present.

“[D]iscard old assumptions, try new techniques, and attempt to meet more rigorous standards of evidence and argument (Broom, 2008).

Innovation and creativity are necessary to teach individuals to think critically, to think for themselves, and not to accept everything they are told. Individuals gain little from being “taught in ways that aim to create a particular national identity, a specific collective memory” (Broom, 2008). Rather, they need to be taught to question facts and be exposed to different meanings and accounts. Through this inquiry, “students will develop their investigative, interpretive, and analytical skills”. (Bloom, 2008)

What I find most fascinating about Collingwood's philosophy is that his works were first published in the early half of the 1900s and then posthumously in the 1990s. His ideas do not conform to the reality in education now. Innovation in education does not necessarily mean new or original, rather something that is not status quo. It can simply imply an improvement, or progress that leads to positive change. If the purpose of education is teach students to be reflective, critical thinkers, then education must move past fact-based narratives to a more holistic form of inquiry.

Christou's *Reflecting from the Margins of Education Faculties: Refiguring the Humanist, and Finding a Space for Story in History* has similar ideas to Broom's article. He too discusses the significant role history plays in contemporary education; the importance of looking to history “to improve schooling and foster affirmative change in society” (Christou, 2010).

History of education is essential in teacher preparation as it “can seek to foster forward-looking, hopeful, and imaginative habits of the mind” (Christou, 2010). While it may sound paradoxical,

looking to the past is essential in changing the present, and the future. Reflection and inquiry into the past helps incite critical thinking as it “can provoke teacher candidate’s imaginations and critical sensibilities” (Christou, 2010). Once individuals begin to question assumptions and the status quo, then positive change can begin to occur.

The foundations of education are in the humanities, however there has been a steady withdrawal from this conception. The ideas and values associated with humanism need to be revisited for positive change to happen. To social reconstructionists, the reform that can occur as a result of this inquiry is social justice and an improvement in society. However, too often teachers conform to their institution’s practices, which prevents this development from occurring. With the expectations that many are burdened with, such as accountability and standardization, it is easy for them to simply “go with the flow”. The study of history is a means of inspiring teachers by exploration.

Who are the individuals that make the decision whether or not to teach history in education? Is there an agenda behind this motive, and if so, what is the purpose of not encouraging critical and analytical thought? One of the many ideas I take away from this article is that teaching and learning are intertwined. If the philosophy behind learning is deepened understanding, new perspectives and positive change, then teachers need to find importance in these same values. Their beliefs need to be in sync with their practices. Unfortunately, many individuals are resistant to change because of the uncertainty that goes along with anything that is unconventional.

“Are young teachers to be cogs in an established order, or are they to be reformers of the establishment, informed by the past and with an eye to the future?” (Christou, 2010).

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

In *Transforming Moral Education*, Dr. Jane Roland Martin discusses how education needs to be redefined and moral education must be transformed. In education, there are “repeated demands for proficiency in the 3Rs, for clear, logical thinking, and for higher standards of achievement in science, mathematics, history and literature”, however there is little to no focus on the 3Cs: care, concern and connection. She argues that in order to successfully move into the future, we have an obligation to rethink human relationships in the terms of love, which Schell calls *generative love*. Martin looks at the *Lifeline* curriculum’s goal of empowering the student to give and receive love and how generative love needs to be learned, as it is not something innate that surfaces as individuals mature.

“The purpose of curriculum was to empower students to give and receive love. It was created around the theme of learning to care and focus on understanding others needs” (Martin, 1987).

The focus of education has been to develop the mind, one that is ruled by reason. Anything outside of this *non-cognitive state* is ignored; such as those attributes associated with feelings, emotions and even creativity. While looking at the contemporary ideal of the educated person, Martin examines two processes of society and education and the stereotypes related to each. The *productive process* comprises those traits typically associated with males such as analysis, critical thinking, self-sufficiency and tasks that include political, social, cultural and economic actions. In other words, the attributes and activities linked the public world of politics and work. The reproductive process includes tasks and traits characteristically considered feminine; feeling, emotion, empathy, intimacy, nurturance and connection.

According to Martin, education today is intended to fit students to carry on in the *productive process*. She suggests that educational ideas are limited by stereotypes that disregard feminine

attributes. Because of this masculine view of education, one that prepares students for carrying on productive processes, there is currently no place in education for caring and love. A change for moral education is difficult because it requires a change in society's value hierarchy.

What resonates with me in my study of historical and philosophical foundations of teaching and learning is the idea that change can only truly occur once society's attitudes move beyond conventionality. Creativity and innovation are values that are not widely accepted in education. If something is unconventional, society is reluctant to change. In Martin's paper, she discusses the barriers cultural stereotypes cause and the difficulty of transforming moral education. Chomsky's article discusses how intellectuals who "take the line of least resistance" are commended, while value-orientated ones are typically rebuked.

In the article *Responsibility of Intellectuals, Redux: Using Privilege to Change Power*, Chomsky looks at the privileged intellectual from the time of Socrates through to Obama's administration and how many of these agents of morality squander their ethical obligations through passiveness and conformity. Chomsky gives examples of value-orientated individuals who have challenged authority and been persecuted as a result of their so-called disobedience. This is ironic in these privileged intellectuals have the opportunity and the power to be the defenders of justice, freedom, mercy and peace, but do not speak out and are admired for their inactivity, while those who defy authority to promote these moral principles are punished.

"[T]hose who line up in the service of the state are typically praised by the general intellectual community, and those who refuse to line up in service of the state are punished" (Chomsky, 2011).

This corresponds with education in that the "privileged" few, those that have the power for change in education, take "the line of least resistance" when it comes to change. Innovation and creativity are rejected because of the uncertainty associated with trying anything different or new. As a result, many individuals are hesitant to attempt anything that is not widely accepted for fear of criticism. As educators, we have a moral obligation to look to the future, through the lenses of innovation and creativity in order to serve our students in the 21st century.

PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING

Philosophy of Education is Bent by Cris Mayo looks at how education has become focused with the scientific perspective, at the expense of philosophy and the humanities. The scientific perspective has become established because it is more tangible and measurable than philosophy of education. It is easy to look at data and statics to measure progress, however this is more difficult to do with critical thinking and problem solving skills.

"Thinking that does not produce an immediately identifiable and quantifiable product is wasteful in a context that is structured to only understand the bottom line" (Mayo, 2011).

According to Mayo, philosophy of education simply needs to be reimagined and creativity can address many of the challenges facing teaching and learning. Innovation is forward thinking, and often, it is important to consider the past when looking for new ways of doing old things. By considering philosophy as a problem-centered approach, students can gain enthusiasm by discovering new ways of thinking, and make meaning of their education. In addition, these skills will help them with future problems. This critical awareness is gained through ongoing conversation that engage students in issues that are relevant to their lives.

Thomas Falkenberg's *Teaching as Contemplative Professional Practice* looks at the role contemplative self-awareness has in teaching. He defines education as a process to the betterment of all living things, and a way for teachers to achieve

"[Philosophy of education] needs to maintain its problem-posing approach and encourage students to think through the dangers caused by certainty but also to maintain curiosity about the approaching problem" (Mayo 2011).

this ideal is through contemplative self-awareness. Meditation creates cognizance of one's inner life and external events: in thoughts and behaviours, as well as actions and reactions. Reflective practice is important as it helps educators become aware of their habitual and automatic routines in their practice. Through understanding one's emotional and mental states, individuals can improve and better connect with their students.

For teachers to improve their professional practice, mediation becomes a way of developing their sensitivities, which helps foster effective relationships with their students and their peers. This moral practice is an ongoing form of professional development that creates and nurtures compassion, respect and decency, values that are necessary for the betterment of society.

“Change in our behavior and our inner life aspects of our professional practice requires a shift in our attentions from what we do not or only insufficiently attend to, to what we have recognized we need to attend to”
(Falkenberg, 2012).

REFLECTION

The knowledge I have gained in this course has reinforced my belief that education is a moral endeavor. I believe that my philosophy of practice statement best articulates my plan for fostering innovation and learning in my professional practice of teaching and learning. By focusing on the ethical component, I am preparing my students as our future, while being mindful of their present realities. In addition, as a current student, I feel that the meaningful and engaging experiences I have participated in both this course and program, have enriched my life, my present reality and my future.

“Newness in an innovation need not just involve new knowledge. Someone may have known about an innovation for some time but not yet developed a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward it, not have adopted or rejected it. The “newness” aspect of an innovation may be expressed in terms of knowledge, persuasion, or a decision to adopt”
(Rogers, 1983).

PHILOSOPHY OF PRACTICE STATEMENT

In order for me to be the best teacher I can be, I continue to attend and care for my students' needs in a variety of ways. This passion is one of the single most important components of effective teaching as it leads to innovation, thorough preparation, continuous evolution of teaching skills, and the pleasure of watching my students grow and develop through their learning. The amount of dedication I put, not only into planning, but also into critical self-reflection, continual growth and life-long learning, directly translates to how my students flourish.

I continuously recognize how my students learn best at both the group and individual level, and differentiate instruction to allow my plans metamorphose as I interact with my students. Regardless of what subject I teach, as their teacher, I guide my students through the learning process of gaining deepened understanding and new perspectives, in the hopes that they will grow to be value oriented, moral individuals.

My moral and ethical promise is to cultivate my students' intellectual developments as human being first by enriching their lives in the present. Those values and skills I believe are important for me as a professional, are the same ones I want my student to exhibit: personal growth, individual fulfillment and self-actualization.

Education is a process of transforming society and bringing about positive, social change. It is also both personal and social. Education is personal in that individuals strive to be moral and ethical citizens, and social in the way they work collectively and collaboratively for the community. I can

nurture this growth by facilitating student learning, fostering effective relationships and making their experiences meaningful and engaging.

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