

History of Grading

When considering the model of education from its earliest times, Hartmann (2000) notes one of mentorship starting with the hunter-gatherers taking their children out on the hunt 100,000 years ago to the model employed by the university founded by Thomas Jefferson. This model was a pass-fail system in which the teacher and student interacted throughout the day and got to know one another.

The teacher knew each child, had a clear vision of each child's understanding of the course work, and worked with each child (or encouraged him/her to work with each other) until the teacher was satisfied each child understood the material...or was hopelessly incapable of being educated. Because the latter was virtually an admission of failure on the part of the teacher, it rarely happened.

Hartmann (2000) states that during those early years, the greatest information a student could provide a potential employer was the name of his/her teacher due to his/her understanding of the student's knowledge, understanding, skill and talent.

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the early 19th Century, traditional practices began to change. With piecework payments becoming more popular, there were schools that began to pay teachers based on the number of students they had, rather than a flat salary. William Farish, a 1792 Cambridge University tutor, came up with a method of teaching that would permit him to process more students in a shorter period of time; he invented grades. This system mimicked a system invented in factories which identified whether or not the products were "up to grade." It was the benchmark through which a determination was made whether workers would be paid and if the products could be sold. There are many limitations to this "grading" system; however, it increased Farish's salary, lowered his workload and decreased the hours he needed to spend in the classroom. The grading system proved to be as efficient for two hundred children as it was for twenty.

Unfortunately, as Hartmann (2000) points out, the "grading system" made it more difficult for students whose style of learning did not match the more instructional, auditory, lecture style of teaching used by Farish. This style of teaching led to more rote learning which was needed to pass tests, whether or not the students understood the material. Critical thinking and questioning skills soon became irrelevant and lost as a goal of **Assessment White Paper: Comprehensive Assessment Programs 5 public education**. Additionally, the teachers' motivation of students through their contagious love of a subject was also lost.

This new assembly line style of education, made possible with the advent of the "grading system," made its way to the United States in the early 1800's. Hartmann (2000) notes, students who did not fit into the conveyor belt gave birth to a new opportunity for adults who would diagnose, treat, and remediate these newly discovered "learning disabled" students. In addition,

responsibility for learning shifted from the teachers to the students due to a mindset that failure was the students own fault as there must be something wrong with them. Just as is in the factory, a system of “sorting” and discarding students began; one which rewards the “standard” and punishes the “different.”

With the 21st Century well upon us, Catholic school educators would do well to look back to the role of the teacher in the earliest times of education and how they worked with their students. Current day students are being prepared for jobs that do not exist, using technologies that have not been invented, to solve problems that are not yet problems. Traditional ways of teaching (often termed the sage on the stage) and assessing (end of the chapter paper-pencil tests) students are no longer sufficient. Students must develop skills in critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity and innovation, inquiry, technology, research, digital discipleship, etc. New instructional and assessment strategies are needed to meet the challenge of preparing the students for their future!

Reference

Hartmann, T. (2000). *Thom Hartmann's Complete Guide to ADHD: Help for Your Family at Home, School & Work*. Nevada City, CA: Underwood Books.