

HISTORY OF EDUCATION

The Early Years

By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is the easiest; and third, by experience, which is the bitterest. [Confucius](#) (551-479 B.C.E.)

Though humankind has lived on this planet for several million years, it's only in the last 10,000 that people began to live together communally, and to raise animals and crops. Approximately 6000 years ago, as societies became more intricate and complex, they began to develop a system of [written language](#) to be able to record and pass down knowledge to the next generation. As the body of knowledge increased, people began to recognize the need for a more formal system of education and formed schools as a result.

Non-Western Civilizations and the Development of Schools

Long before the Greeks and the Romans developed their schools, Eastern civilizations had highly developed and complex societies requiring formalized education. While the exact date when schools actually began will probably never be determined. Evidence exists that the ancient [Sumerians](#) of Mesopotamia, the fertile crescent between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in what is modern-Iraq, had cuneiform (a form of writing) texts for mathematics that have been dated to 2000 BC.



Schools probably existed in [China](#) almost 4000 years ago. As a highly developed society, the Chinese designed their schools around the perpetuation of tradition, compliance and conventionality, to allow their youth to function in an increasingly formal and complex society. The individual was not deemed particularly important, rather it was the individual's acceptance of the cultural traditions and practices and his place in society that characterized educational practice. Females for the most part were not deemed worthy of a formal education.

	As with many other cultures, the Japanese system of education evolved after they developed a written language. Adapting the Chinese form of writing, the Japanese aristocracy was the first to learn to read and write. Originally the Japanese borrowed heavily from the Chinese culture in providing a curriculum of study. However, eventually the needs of Japanese society became paramount and the educational system began to reflect a Japanese culture and belief system. Education was also used to provide for the societal needs such as the specific schools that were set up to train young men for civil service.
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The [Hebrews](#) valued education and centered their instruction around the teachings of their bible. Harsh discipline also characterized educational practice along with a strict emphasis on following the laws of the Old Testament. Females were not formally educated, but instead were required to learn the skills associated with homemaking. Teachers were treated with great respect, indicative of the value that Hebrew society placed on education.

Ancient [Hindu](#) societies were based on a strict adherence to a proscribed system of familial status known as the caste system, whereby an individual's status is determined by his family's place in the society. Formal education helped perpetuate this system by only allowing access to boys from the highest or Brahmin caste. Priests were used as teachers resulting in a heavy emphasis on moral development, learning to write, and harsh discipline.



The Egyptians developed a very early, highly civilized society. They had a form of writing known as [hieroglyphics](#), and were divided into castes. The [priests](#) were the most highly educated segment of society and provided the instruction for the privileged males deemed worthy of learning.

Each of these societies in their own way contributed to the development of schools and education. Many of the practices spread to other parts of the world through travel and conquest. Several important Greek philosophers, such as Plato, Pythagoras, Lycurgus, and Solon studied in Egypt.

The societies described above were quite similar in the design of their formal education systems in that all excluded females and were limited to mainly the upper classes. These practices helped perpetuate and sustain the existing class and power structure within each society by denying the disenfranchised the opportunity to access the information they needed to become members of the elite group. These customs were also part of European and American formal education up until the beginning of the 20th century.

Think about It:

1. *Why do we need to study the historical foundations of education?*
2. *What event(s) or discoveries contributed to the development of formal schooling?*
3. *What were the major factors that contributed to the development of schools in Hebrew, Egyptian, Chinese, Japanese, and Hindu societies?*

The Greeks and Romans: Education Moves into Western Europe

Bodily exercise, when compulsory, does no harm to the body; but knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold on the mind. Plato (427-347 B C) The Republic. Book VII.

Around 500 BC, the [Greeks](#) developed a society that was divided into city-states and was sufficiently complex to require a formal educational system. Two of the more prominent were Athens and Sparta.

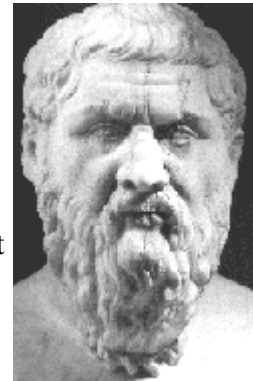
Education in [Sparta](#) was primarily for the purpose of developing a strong military to both protect from and conquer neighboring states. Both boys and girls were subjected to a rigorous survival test of exposure to the elements during infancy to determine if they had the necessary capabilities to become warriors or mothers of warriors. Boys were then given physical and moral training to designed to develop a strong military. Development of the intellect was not considered to be of particular usefulness.

In [Athens](#), the approach to education was designed to promote the development of both body and mind. Boys were formally educated from the age of eight to sixteen in various disciplines, which emphasized the principles of moderation and balance. From ages sixteen to twenty, the boys underwent military training. Girls were educated in the home.

Ancient Greece contributed much to our way of looking at and thinking about the concept of education. In particular, the philosophers, [Socrates](#) (470-399 BC), [Plato](#) (427-347 BC), and [Aristotle](#) (384-322 BC) had a profound influence on modern educational practice. All three believed that a person's most important purpose was to serve and improve humankind and that education was designed for this end.

Socrates developed a method of teaching called the Socratic method, whereby the teacher asks a series of questions that lead the student to a conclusion. This method is still commonly used in modern educational practice. Socrates believed that knowledge was a virtue and that it was essential to understanding. At times he was critical of the government and eventually chose to end his life rather than end his teaching.

Plato was a student of Socrates. He was the father of idealism and believed that the aim of education was to develop an individual's abilities to better serve society. He founded the Academy, the world's first university, and was one of the first people to advocate the formal education of both males and females.



As the father of Realism, Aristotle, who was a pupil of Plato, believed that knowledge exists independently in the world as opposed to Plato's belief that ideas are the ultimate reality. He was the father of the scientific method and taught logic as a formal discipline. His writings greatly influenced humankind (Parkay & Stanford, 1998).

The [Romans](#) conquered Greece in 146 BC and started to assimilate many of the concepts and educational philosophies from the Greeks into their own system. The Roman school system divided instruction into two levels, consisting of an elementary period or ludus from age seven to twelve, and a secondary school from age twelve to sixteen. Females were actually allowed to attend the ludus and receive a formal education. However, few girls received an education past age twelve.

[Quintilian](#) (35-95 AD) was one of the most noted and far-thinking of the Roman educators. His writings, which were discovered in the 14th century, became the basis for the humanistic movement in education (Johnson, et al., 1996). Quintilian believed that corporal punishment was not necessary, that school holidays were needed to refresh and encourage the student to further study, that instruction should reflect the development of the child and that children shouldn't be taught new material until they could master it.

Think about It:

- 1. How did the Greeks and Romans contribute to the development of our present educational system?*
- 2. Why were schools and education deemed necessary in these societies?*

The Fall of the Roman Empire and the Dark Ages

Three things are necessary for the salvation of man: to know what he ought to believe; to know what he ought to desire; and to know what he ought to do.
Thomas Aquinas

The [Dark Ages](#), as the period between the Fall of Rome and the beginning of the Middle Ages is known, was a period of little progress in human learning, at least in the western world. In other regions, this was not the case. Mohammed, the prophet of Islam (569-632), inspired a rich period of discovery and learning flourished in this climate. Of particular note was the development of Arabic numerals, which replaced the cumbersome Roman system. Later, the Moors conquered southern Spain and the Arab culture slowly began to influence Western learning.

In Western Europe during the Dark Ages, it was politically chaotic, with the invasion of Rome by barbarians and the break-up of the Roman Empire. Whereas Rome had formed the nucleus of a stable system of government and continuity that extended over large portions of the Western world, now this world was broken into much smaller and constantly warring states. The Roman Catholic Church was able to provide some form of stability and meaning to people through their emphasis on gaining entrance to heaven and de-emphasizing the importance of life on earth.

Human learning regressed during this period as the Church sought to control the education of the common people, placing increasing importance on obedience and denouncing the study of philosophy as contradictory to its teaching. In turn only the clergy and some nobility were allowed to learn to read and write. For the masses, teaching was done by the clergy and was directed towards inducting people into the faith, relying on oral transmission of liturgy. The power of the Roman Catholic Church was maintained through the hope of salvation and eternal life. The Church was the intercessor between heaven and damnation. [Charlemagne](#) (742-814) of the Franks attempted to establish schools and promote education. Even though [Alcuin](#) (735-804), Charlemagne's advisor and teacher, aided him in this task, they were unable to make much progress.

Around 1000 AD, humankind slowly began to realize the importance and need for learning. Some of the writings of Aristotle were re-discovered and the Roman Catholic Church began to accept some of the doctrines of philosophy. [Thomas Aquinas](#) (1255-1274) who wrote the *Summa Theologica*, helped bring about this change by formalizing scholasticism or the logical and philosophical study of the beliefs of the Catholic Church. His educational philosophy, called *Thomism* in his honor, is still central to education in parochial schools.

[Medieval universities](#) at Bologna, Paris, Oxford, and Salerno were established and became forerunners of our modern institutions. By 1500, almost eighty universities had been established and human learning in the Western world began to revive.

Think about It:

1. *After the Fall of the Roman Empire in 476 AD, human learning regressed. What were some of the factors contributing to the demise of formal education throughout the Western world?*
2. *What conditions contributed to the re-emergence of formal education and schools?*

A Time of Change: The Renaissance and the Reformation

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas. John Locke

The period known as the Renaissance began in northern Europe and Italy and spread throughout the rest of the Western world. It signaled a renewed interest in the Greco-Roman traditions of art, literature and reviving classical learning known as [humanism](#). The humanists believed that by transferring power and wealth away from the Church back to the people, the human condition would improve. In turn education was an important aspect, centered on the study of ancient classical literature, in particular the works of Plato and Aristotle.

[Martin Luther](#) challenged the authority of the Catholic Church directly when in 1517, he nailed his *Ninety-five Theses* to the church door in Wittenberg, in what is now Germany. As a result, a century of religious turmoil began and the people who protested the teachings of the Catholic Church came to be known as Protestants. The Protestants believed in self-determinism and that the teachings of the Bible should be read by individuals rather than interpreted by priests. Thus education, at least the ability to read the Bible, was seen as a necessary ingredient in providing people the tools for salvation. Luther and his co-worker, [Melanchthon](#), (1497-1560) were advocates for the education of all social classes and for females. In addition, both Luther and Melanchthon felt that education should be state-supported.



The invention of the [printing press](#) by Johan Gutenberg (1400-1468) and use of moveable type by the end of the 15th century contributed to the dissemination of printed material and the spread of ideas. Prior to this time, books were hand-lettered usually by monks that limited their availability.

[Johann Comenius](#) (1592-1670) wrote some of the first texts containing illustrations. Comenius was a man ahead of his time. Many of his ideas such as integrated learning, collaborative teaching, and the concept of developing the life-long learner are part modern day pedagogy in teacher-training programs. He also believed that the teacher is essential to the education process and needs to be respected and justly compensated. Most of his ideas were not well received during his lifetime and were not universally accepted.



[John Locke](#) (1632-1704) was an English educator during the 17th century. He wrote many educational works, but the two most influential were *Some Thoughts on Education* and the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke believed that ideas originated as a result of experience. He stressed the importance of education in developing the mind of the person. In fact a good education could improve a person, while a bad one could achieve the opposite result. Locke emphasized practical and effective methods of teaching and advocated a non-threatening environment for the learner.

When Martin Luther led the Protestant Reformation, [Ignatius of Loyola](#) (1491-1556) organized the Jesuits to establish schools and promote the Catholic Church. Though the original intent was the advancement of the advancement of Catholicism, the Society of Jesuits became a great teaching order and developed their own system of training teachers.

Think about It:

1. What were the beliefs of the Renaissance Humanists and how did these beliefs promote the development of formal education?
2. How and why did the Reformation develop? How did the Reformation affect the development of schools and education?
3. Consider the power of one person in bringing about change. Who were some of the significant figures during this time of change and how did they contribute to the growth of schools and formal education? Would it be possible for a person to have this kind of impact today?
4. How did the invention of the printing press affect the development of schools and education?

The 18th Century and Beyond: The Age of Enlightenment or Reason

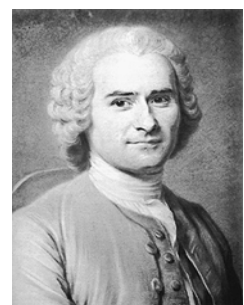
It is not enough to have a good mind; the main thing is to use it well.
Rene Descartes

The 18th century became known as the Age of Enlightenment or Reason because of a rebellion of the intellectuals against superstition and ignorance. Philosophers such as [Descartes](#) (1595-1650) and [Voltaire](#) (1745-1827) believed in the ability of humans to reason and the power of rational thought. Descartes, though not an educator in the strictest sense of the word, influenced the development of education because of his belief in human's ability to achieve truth through reasoning and rational thought. Voltaire was heavily influenced by Descartes and through his extensive writings helped elevate formal education and bring about a new interest in learning.

Frederick the Great (1712-1786) of Prussia, a friend of Voltaire, believed in the value of an educated populace. He implemented some of the first laws regarding education and the licensing of teachers. He wanted people to learn to read and write in order to become useful citizens. However, he did not see much need for extending general education beyond that point.

While philosophers such as Descartes and Voltaire advocated for reason and scientific inquiry, a second movement signaled a revolution in the way people viewed themselves, which became known as the *Emergence of Common Man*. Previously, common people had accepted their lot in life and not challenged the fixed order such as the *Divine Right of Kings* and the strict stratification of society. Now people were revolting against the established order and demanding a better life and more opportunities. Education became important because it was seen as a means of allowing people to better themselves. This philosophy also had profound implications politically, as the 18th century was a time of governmental unrest and revolt against the establishment.

[Jean-Jacques Rousseau](#) (1712-1778) was primarily a philosopher, who wrote the *Social Contract*, a book that played an important role in influencing the thinking that led to the American and French Revolutions. Though not considered an educator per se, Rousseau wrote a great deal on the subject of education. His book, [Émile](#), described the ideal education of



a youth and stated that education should match the child's age of development. Rousseau also believed in the natural goodness of children.

[Johann Pestalozzi](#) (1746-1827) was a Swiss educator who actually put into practice many of Rousseau's ideas. Pestalozzi, like Rousseau, was a proponent of designing instruction to complement a child's stage of development. He believed that learning should begin with concrete experiences before moving to the abstract and should start with the simple and progress to the more complex. In addition he advocated that children learn more effectively when they feel secure and have healthy self-esteem. He held that children should be treated with love and kindness. Pestalozzi was especially sensitive to the needs of poor children and expressed a deep compassion for them.

As a student of Pestalozzi's, [Johann Friedrich Herbart](#) (1776-1841) refined Pestalozzi's theories about education and developed a five step process for teaching that is still being used:

1. *Preparation*: the set-up, whereby the student is helped to understand how the new knowledge relates to the old.
2. *Presentation*: the part of the lesson where the student is given the new material in a manner that is developmentally appropriate.
3. *Association*: connecting the new concept with the old.
4. *Generalization*: understanding the broad concept.
5. *Application*: using the new concept or knowledge effectively.



[Friedrich Froebel](#) (1782-1852) was another proponent of Rousseau and Pestalozzi's theories of education. Froebel established the first kindergarten, where young children were given a developmentally appropriate education with an emphasis on learning through experience and the social growth of the child. Froebel believed that women were the most capable of teaching this age group.

With the rapid growth of industrialization, urbanization and population growth, societies soon felt the need for a more educated populace who could become efficient workers. An Englishman, [Joseph Lancaster](#) (1778-1838), developed a monitorial system for overcrowded schools, whereby older students (monitors) would teach younger ones under the direction of a teacher. This system allowed one teacher to teach hundreds of students. The monitorial system spread from England to the United States where it became popular as a way of quickly and cheaply educating an immigrant population.

Though this group of educators and philosophers had a profound influence on the development of educational practice, it is important to remember that the average European actually had access to very little education. Most people during this time could barely read or write and only the upper classes and the wealthy had the luxury of providing a more advanced education for their children. Female children, even in these classes, were still largely educated at home, more often in the arts of running a household and in music, drawing and painting, and sewing.

Think about It:

6. *The 18th century is known as the Age of Enlightenment or the Age of Reason partly because of the philosophers such as Descartes and Voltaire who believed in the power of man's ability to think logically and reasonably. How did this "enlightened" way of thinking affect the development of educational practice?*
7. *Where are the influences of Rousseau and Pestalozzi still felt in schools today?*