

A HISTORY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

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Summary

A study of the history of learning reveals that training and education of all types, academic and work-related, are largely the products of social and economic conditions. Over time, the concepts of training and education have been identical, overlapping, or totally discrete depending on the prevailing social, political, and economic conditions.

Human resource development is a field with historical roots in both education and the world of work. Its broad foundations in related social and technical fields notwithstanding, human resource development is, first and foremost, a field of education that is for, and about work. Although the human resource development field has developed significantly since the Second World War, the historical origins of human resource development cannot be separated from the histories of education and training. The history of human resource development is the history of training and education for work.

The history of human resource development (HRD) has its roots in the origins of education and training. In tracing the history of HRD this chapter sketches man's progress from survival-driven learning, to education shaped by the classics and Christianity, to the influences of war and military strategy on scientific and technical education, to the skills training and scientific management spawned by the industrial era, and finally, to the training of contemporary workers, technicians, and managers—the immediate predecessors of contemporary HRD.

1. Introduction

The chapter presents an international perspective on the history of HRD by revealing its multiple international origins and through discussions of the evolution of HRD through the lens of eight countries/regions—China, The Netherlands, three African nations—Tanzania, Nigeria, and the Republic of South Africa, the former USSR, Australia, and the U.S. Each country tells a different story about HRD, which reflect the different purposes and levels of maturity that HRD has reached in different parts of the world.

The final section of the chapter discusses developments in HRD since World War II that have contributed to the dynamic and multi-dimensional field that HRD is today. These developments include the expansion and development of the HRD discipline in the post-war period, the influences of technology, and a discussion of two forces that continue to shape the HRD field—the evolving nature of work and change as a perennial element in organizational life. The promises and pitfalls of HRD as a catalyst for change in organizations and as a developer of expertise in individuals are discussed as legacies of HRD's past and opportunities for HRD's future.

2. In the Beginning: Survival through Labor and Learning

Human experience and the nature of human development have passed through many stages since the very beginning of man's journey. Training in its most simple form was found among our most primitive ancestors. The development of early man was driven exclusively by the need to survive. At this time, what little could be called training and education “consisted of learning how to obtain the necessities of life for self and family, and how to propitiate the unseen powers supposed to be active in nature” (Davidson, 1900, p. 21). Although *learning* involved the making of simple tools from wood, stone, and fibers, primitive man knew nothing about the productive use of fire and of metals. Harnessing these elements would later become critical to man's further development.

3. The Use of Tools and Mutual Cooperation

Eventually humans gained the ability to control fire for the cooking of food, the smelting of metals, and the making of simple mechanical and agricultural tools. This allowed people to engage in *crafts* and undertake domestic activities that were previously impossible without basic tools. It also led to a true division of labor wherein some pursued weaving, others became carpenters, still others became stone masons, and so on. For the first time, people began to rely on tools and on each other to meet their needs. Indeed, humanity's progress through the ages has been inextricably linked to the development of practical tools and securing the bonds of mutual cooperation necessary for survival. With the development of tools and bonds of mutual cooperation came a new form of education--one characterized by *conscious* imitation rather than the *unconscious* imitation (Bennett, 1926). The transfer of skill from one person to another now became a conscious process. Learning occurred through deliberate imitation of examples provided by one who had achieved mastery of a particular skill. Yet, training followed no theory or system and had not yet become a rational process. Those seeking a skill simply copied a model over and over until it could be precisely reproduced. Despite some advancement, the training of one person by another was still a quite primitive process. Especially during humanity's early history, modest intellectual development came almost exclusively through efforts to adapt to a harsh physical and social environment. As the history written here reveals, the training and education needed for human progress was painfully slow in developing.

4. The Influence of the Greeks and Romans

The key Roman legacy has been their ingenuity in creating the institutions needed to carry out political and social agendas. Although the Romans did not have as a profound influence on education as did the Greeks, the Roman educational infrastructure and organization of schools continued to persist well after the conquest and fall of the Roman Empire.

4.1 The Greek Disdain for Menial Work

The legacy of *the Golden Age of Greece* has been a philosophy of education that, unlike any culture since that of ancient Greece, is most consistent with the present notion of a *liberal* education. Indeed, the Greeks were the first to see education as providing an opportunity for individual development. The Greek's legacy has often gone unnoticed.

The Greek conception of education included many dimensions vital to individual development that are still valued today. Human inquiry into all phases of life--nature, man, the supernatural--was an important dimension of Greek education that is today often considered the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. The moral dimension of education, which emphasized the ethical rights and responsibilities of individuals, first found expression during the Greek era. In addition, aesthetic education and education's role as an agent of cultururation and citizenship were first proposed by the Greeks. Above all, the

Greeks viewed education as a vehicle for individual development and personal achievement and a means for developing and diversifying their talents.

Despite this perspective, the Greeks did not hold the same generous view of training in the trades and mechanical arts (Bennett, 1926). They felt disdain toward what were seen as menial occupations in agriculture and manufacturing such as farming, cattle raising, shoemaking, smithing, and toolmaking. Socrates is credited with providing some reasons for this contempt for handwork. He wrote of these trades as ruining the bodies of those who work at them, having gloomy and distasteful working conditions, allowing little time for leisure, and providing no development of the mind or soul (Moore, 1936). With this attitude toward manual work, it is not surprising that training in manual arts had no place in the education of Greek youth of the upper classes. Yet training in manual arts was not completely shunned by the Greeks, for it was through an enduring system of *apprenticeship* among the lower classes that skills were developed in goods production, construction, agriculture, and other areas which were instrumental in the historic accomplishments of Greek civilization. Apprenticeship training clearly had an important role in the development of ancient Greece. Several contributions to the development of ideas about learning by well-known Greek philosophers are noteworthy. In the following sections we review significant contributions to educational thought from three major Greek philosophers: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

The influential work of Socrates (469-399 BC) is known to us only through the writing of others for, unlike other major Greek philosophers, Socrates wrote nothing. It is upon Plato's portrait of him that we chiefly rely for information about the work of Socrates. Socrates developed a dialectic method of inquiry to achieve more universal and complete knowledge than one might achieve alone. Socrates' methods of teaching, and in particular, his use of dialogue, called into question the effectiveness of formal lecturing which was the accepted method of instruction at the time.

Socrates' method of inquiry, known as the *Socratic method*, was based on careful dialogue and adroit questioning for the purpose of discovering the underlying truth in a particular line of reasoning. Socrates would initially accept the views and line of reasoning of another person, often a student, and then through skillful questioning, he would further develop these views until the contradictions and logical inconsistencies in the original position were apparent to both Socrates and his student. Following his own instincts for logic and adhering to an open dialectic process, Socrates continually sought to develop the capacity for logical reasoning in others. Like much of the thinking on education first offered by Greek philosophers, Socrates' notion of an open dialectic process for education was quite advanced for its time, for it would not be until the twelfth century and the enlightened views of scholasticism that dialogue, open questioning, and debate would slowly come into their own as accepted methods of educational exchange.

Plato (420-348 BC) in the *Republic* brings together the domains of politics, education, and philosophy through the literary form of a dialogue, in which Socrates--Plato's mentor--is both the narrator and chief figure. The *Republic* is Plato's exposition of an ideal society in which he develops an elaborate system of knowledge that integrates his

thinking on philosophy, the nature of knowledge, politics, justice, and educational theory. The *Republic* is a carefully developed series of ten “books” through which Plato provides his conceptions of justice, individual virtue, the characteristics of an ideal society, the role and training of those who govern, and the laws and relationships that bond individuals together as a society.

In the *Republic* Plato also develops a comprehensive theory of education and provides the first well-articulated breakdown and description of the content of elementary and higher education. Plato prescribed a curriculum for primary education that was based on instruction in reading and writing, recitation from selected literature, and training in music and gymnastics. Higher education, which Plato felt should address the development of the ideal qualities of leadership in the “philosopher-ruler,” was composed of studies in mathematics, geometry, astronomy, harmonics, and philosophy. The scope and detail of Plato’s thinking on the composition of an ideal education is quite remarkable when one considers that Plato integrated his thinking on education into an elaborate pattern of ideas dealing with the fundamental issues that confront human beings as citizens.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was the first of the great western thinkers to attempt to systematize knowledge and develop a language through which scientific inquiry could be conducted. Aristotle realized that in order to formulate principles to guide scientific study of the natural world, he first had to develop the field of logic by carefully analyzing all the elements of reasoning. He did this through a series of treatises on logic referred to as the *Organon*. Each work examined a component of the reasoning process (i.e., the term, proposition, syllogism) from the perspective of its place in the structured search for principles by which the observable world could be scientifically studied. Aristotle’s *Organon* provided the original basis for scientific thought in a wide range of intellectual disciplines. His efforts to systematize knowledge were so fundamental that he not only provided a basis for scientific terminology, but for everyday language as well. Aristotle defined terms in a scientific context for the first time such as *cause*, *principle*, *category*, and *subject matter*. These and other terms defined by Aristotle have been used in the language of science and everyday life ever since.

Much of Aristotle’s thinking on education is expressed in *The Politics*, a very practical treatise on the ways in which education should enrich the lives of Greek citizens. Aristotle believed that the responsibility for providing a proper education to all should be under the control of the state; it should not be left in private hands. The ideal curriculum should develop both the mind and the body.

4.2 The Pragmatic View of the Romans

The Romans adopted Greek ideals but went further by integrating them into Roman life through the establishment of related laws and institutions. Unlike the standards of excellence and harmony held by the Greeks, the Romans were a more practical people whose judgments were based on usefulness and effectiveness. Although their influence on education was not nearly as profound as that of the Greeks, the Romans provide an

example of how laws and political infrastructure can be used to achieve long-term social, economic, and cultural change.

The great Roman achievements in public works, architecture, and the construction of roads and aqueducts is well known, and yet there is little evidence that the handwork and mechanical arts required for these accomplishments were valued by the Romans. Like the Greeks, the Romans relied on tradesmen and laborers to develop the infrastructure of their empire, despite the fact that technical and manual skills were never held in high esteem. Romans acquired these skills through *family apprenticeship*. An important duty of Roman fathers was the development of practical skills and trades in their children.

The Roman empire, like others which reached a period of great success, eventually began to decline. Roman life became more corrupt as lethargy and materialism replaced the virility and strength of character associated with early Rome. Roman education became artificial and drained of the vitality it once had. Even before the invasion of Rome by barbarians from the north, education provided by the early Christian Church was gradually replacing Roman education in both substance and spirit. The influence of Christianity on the purposes and methods of education was to continue to grow throughout the Middle Ages.

5. Education and Training in the Middle Ages

The goals and methods of training continued to be influenced by the many developments which occurred during an extended period in history known as the Middle Ages. Barlow (1967) characterizes the period spanned by the Middle Ages in the following way:

The so-called Middle Ages account for approximately a thousand years of history between ancient and modern. Beginning in the early 300's and extending into the early 1300's, the period is divided into two nearly equal parts. The turning point between the early and later Middle Ages is marked at 800, when Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor (p. 18).

The influence of Christianity permeated medieval life. Although successive imperial decrees during the fourth century made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire, for all practical purposes institutional control of the people had already passed to the Church. In the wake of the decadent Romans and barbarous Goths and Vandals, there was a great need for the structure and moral discipline that Christianity offered. The Church also embraced the lower classes which had been neglected by the pagan society of Rome and the elitist culture of Greece. Greco-Roman culture and education were methodically displaced by the training and rituals of Christianity: training in Church dogma and spiritual consciousness replaced Greek aesthetic and intellectual ideals and rigid moral training and discipline were substituted for Roman materialism. Under the dominance of Christianity, the education of that era received a completely new character.

Although Christians of this time had no special antagonism toward the Roman empire, they were forced into a difficult dilemma when Roman authorities demanded that they demonstrate their loyalty to Rome through sacrificial rituals that Christians considered

idolatrous. When Christians refused to pay homage to the pagan gods of Rome--more out of concern for betraying their Christian faith than for lack of loyalty to Rome--they were persecuted and imprisoned. This led to Christian cynicism toward a culture that they increasingly saw as pagan and materialistic. As the schism between Christians and the Roman authorities widened, Christians increasingly rejected all things pagan. For them, this included the philosophy and literature of Greece and Rome.

Christian influences during this period played a pivotal role in shaping what would become the curriculum for secondary and higher education for the medieval period and beyond. The origin of the notion of the *liberal arts* can be traced back to Plato, who identified subjects such as grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic as essential elements of the liberal education intended for all free citizens. The idea of the liberal arts was an important part of the Greek cultural tradition inherited by Rome. Scholars of the third and fourth centuries took on what they saw as the important task of formalizing the content of the liberal arts and establishing the number of subjects to be designated as the liberal arts.

5.1 The Influence of Monastic Schools

An important element of Christian discipline and teaching is the spiritual value of one's own labor. This was exemplified by the fervor and discipline of early Christian monastic life. As the intellectual landscape became more barren in the Middle Ages, the burden of academic learning and preserving the classics fell almost completely to Christian monasteries.

The Christian value of labor and the role of the monastery as guardian of academic learning combined to provide an environment conducive to the advancement of manual labor and training in manual and mechanical arts.

Monasteries operated many small-scale agricultural and goods producing functions needed to maintain an independent existence such as gardens, mills, bakeries, and various shops for construction and maintenance. Monks and prelates skilled in these trades directed monastery operations and provided the necessary training in agriculture, practical arts and crafts, and various building and mechanical skills (Bennett, 1926). Practical and technical training such as it was at that time was a central part of monastic life.

Monasteries were also the center of intellectual life and preserver of literature and art throughout the Middle Ages. All who participated in monastic life were taught basic reading and writing skills.

In addition, monks worked tirelessly at writing manuscripts, producing and preserving books, and developing their skills in the arts of painting, music, and sculpture. As the skills of writing and bookmaking were held in high esteem, academic and artistic training were also an important part of monastic life.

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