

Thinkers in ancient greece and in the enlightenment education essay



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Abstract

In the centuries between Ancient Greece and the Enlightenment, revolutions irrevocably altered the status quo in many fields. One of the largest sources of radical change was found in the education system. Whether analyzing the methods of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, or Mary Wollstonecraft, the importance of the contributions made by each thinker is manifested not only in their respective period, but also in the modern world. The most important differences in the education systems of the Enlightenment and Ancient Greece lie not in the lessons taught, but in their implications on students and society. The shifts in progressive attitudes held by the thinkers of these periods, the focus and importance of humanities education, and the role of women in the classroom are the utmost representations of change between two of the most revolutionary periods in history.

Thinkers in Ancient Greece and in the Enlightenment

Ancient Greek thinkers Sappho, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are arguably the most prominent educational revolutionaries of the period, and their answers regarding questions of humanity, citizenship, truth and morality have held influence relevant beyond their years (Murphy, 2006). Murphy argues that Sappho's educational ideologies revolved around cultivating the student as a whole while also serving as a mentor for young women in order to improve their abilities as wives and Greeks, while Socrates questioned the role of the teacher in asking questions to develop their students' abilities - known as the Socratic Method - and the importance of the morality in the classroom (2006). Socrates also argued that the ultimate beneficiary in societal education was society itself (Harris, 2009). Influenced by the methods and theories of Sappho and Socrates, Plato and Aristotle developed their own philosophies; Plato's ideologies argued that the " purpose of education is to help the students to grow and develop their character," (Murphy, 2006) and that education is directly correlated and catered to those who will have power in their country. Aristotle saw education as " inquiry into everything, plus dissemination of the resultant knowledge," especially when distinguishing between " right" and " wrong" (Harris, 2009).

While the thinkers in Ancient Greece aimed to understand the human brain and how to best cultivate it, revolutionary minds in the Enlightenment sought to understand the implications of this cultivation. In a study regarding schools in the Enlightenment conducted by Owens (2011), it was found that " early schools focused on inculcating students with proper knowledge to first be good members of the church, and secondly be good Christian

members of their immediate community.” Prominent thinkers of the Enlightenment, including Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Locke and Mary Wollstonecraft held views that built upon the Ancient Greek foundation of education. Rousseau’s aims, as argued by Jonathan Israel (2012), were to ensure that education and nature were in harmony; he advocated gender segregated education under the comprehension that males and females naturally learned in different ways. Authority, Rousseau argued, could not be used as a teaching method; if a child was taught under a strict authority, they would learn nothing but the power of this force (Zuckerman, 2012). John Locke sought a liberated student. Through teaching a “ natural equality” (Ruderman & Godwin, 2000), thus allowing him to utilize his principles in a general way, Locke opposed political intervention and segregation in education while advocating for the modern idea of home-schooling. Mary Wollstonecraft has been hailed as the prominent “ feminist educator” of the Enlightenment (Murphy, 2006). Her educational theories included meditations on Locke’s philosophy and the Socratic Method; through advocating equality for women in the classroom and in society, Wollstonecraft was able to build her theories around moral identities of students and the implications of gender on education (Murphy, 2006).

The attitudes of thinkers in Ancient Greece revolved around comprehending the basic capabilities of human knowledge, while their Enlightenment-based counterparts sought the ability to build upon and utilize these teachings in order to create an ideal student. Various theories, such as the Socratic Method or John Locke’s “ blank slate” approach to teaching, have been introduced through these thinkers and their prevalence in the classroom is

still notable. The shifts between centuries manifest themselves in the sense of “ higher” thinking achieved by the philosophers of the Enlightenment; without Ancient Greek musings on character development through education, there could be no philosophy regarding how best to utilize and maximize the potential of the mind.

The Value of an Arts Education

In a dialogue between Ancient Greek philosophers Socrates and Glaucon, in which the merits and detriments of an arts education are debated, the value of comprehending poetry or engaging in art, Socrates argues, is good only for personal growth – there can be little to no benefit for the state (Of what value is arts education?, 2002). Traditional education in Ancient Greece necessitated only a basic comprehension of the arts for male students while females were taught primarily through dance, song and poetry (Murphy, 2006). The goal of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle was to achieve a virtuous student through education; only Sappho aimed to achieve this virtue exclusively through demonstrating and teaching the arts to her students – with the ultimate goal of making them marriageable (Murphy, 2006). The view of the student as a creature needing to be tamed with knowledge left no room for the docile pursuit of comprehending the arts. Ancient Greece, though the pinnacle of early progressive thinking in the field of education, focused more wholly on the cultivation of people who could contribute their able minds to society rather than contributing their exactitude for understanding the arts.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau contributed various views on the implications of teaching students the arts. He argued that if his colleagues taught sciences <https://assignbuster.com/thinkers-in-ancient-greece-and-in-the-enlightenment-education-essay/>

and the arts as a sole curriculum, “ they would be ruining the nation’s children by preparing them for leisure and enjoyment, instead of for labour, for luxury instead of austerity, for refinement instead of simplicity” (Israel, 2012). Regarding the lack of arts in Sparta, Rousseau viewed the early city as tyrannous to poets, and its abilities to expel from its walls artists a point of virtue; an unbending sense of moral virtue and education could not be intertwined with artful pursuits if successful pedagogy were to be achieved (2012). While the Enlightenment was a time of higher learning and diverse thinking, the aims of education were to cultivate reasonability in students and give them the tools to successfully question their world (Murphy, 2006). Friedrich Froebel advocated the use of these tools in arts education, as he believed children could enhance learning through hands-on comprehension and develop a self-governing sense of play and creativity (Murphy, 2006). Cultivating the “ whole child,” it could be argued, included ensuring all of their potential interests were explored, regardless of societal benefits.

The goals of thinkers in the Enlightenment in reference to education often overlap; their methodology of achievement, however, shows obvious disdain or purpose for cultivating the artful tastes of the student. The benefits associated with teaching students about humanities, as argued by Socrates, could be only personal, or, as argued by Rousseau, mostly useless in society. Essentially, the implications of teaching students about the humanities are still considered in modern education. Between Ancient Greece and the Enlightenment, views became more polarizing regarding the arts, and the development of curriculum in both periods reflects these changes.

The Education of Women

The goal of educating women in Ancient Greece was primarily to train them for a life of marriage and household duties. Women's schools, such as that of Sappho, existed only to enhance students' abilities to perform tasks in the home domain (Murphy, 2006). Even within Sappho's school, not all women were equal in their lowered status; Sappho taught women about appropriate behaviour and appropriate dress, but held obvious contempt for women who did not partake in propriety. Ingalls (1999) found that Sappho viewed behaviour as the utmost representation of skill, stating that " a woman who has wealth without culture will contribute nothing worthwhile, nothing memorable to her community." The merits of a school primarily dealing with the education of women become overshadowed by the fact that these women were viewed only as objects to become vaguely cultured and married away to men, at which point their lives would revolve around keeping a home and raising children in order to be ideal representations of society (Murphy, 2006).

During the Enlightenment, the ideologies surrounding the implications of gender became more prominent; education, it was argued, should be based on ability rather than gender (Murphy, 2006). Rousseau argued that boys alone should learn practical, " manly" skills such as measurement and carpentry, while girls alone would learn of spinning, sewing and cleaning. This segregation was in concurrence with Rousseau's theory that education should prepare children for work (Israel, 2012). Differences in gender also served to explain perceived differences in mind. Biology, it was argued, was the reason women had " presence of mind, incisiveness, and subtle

observations,” yet these skills were not suitable in practical aspects of life, and should be utilized mostly in developing womanly roles of mothers and wives (Sobe, 2012). Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the first feminist educators, argued against the perceived limitations of sex; by actively disapproving of traditionally “female” pursuits such as use of cosmetics and artificial mannerisms, Wollstonecraft was able to campaign for the liberation of the female student in the classroom and in society (Murphy, 2006).

The implications of gender in the classroom in both Ancient Greece and the Enlightenment played important roles in the concept of education and equality. Women in society – as students, children, mothers or wives – faced segregation based on their sex and their perceived inability to perform the same tasks as their male counterparts. In Ancient Greece, the concept of feminist intervention was to further segregate women students in order to teach them propriety through strictness and the arts. The Enlightenment, though vastly improved in the rights of humans, played host to revolutionary thoughts regarding the education and capabilities of females, insofar as that their abilities may match those of men. The growth in education systems following each period is representative of the alterations in societal focus and an obvious example of the difference between Ancient Greece and the Enlightenment.

Conclusion

Though centuries apart, both Ancient Greece the Enlightenment are immensely reflective of not only each other, but modern society. The foundations for education discovered and built upon in Ancient Greek society served as the groundwork for conceptualizing and modernizing education
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during the Enlightenment. The differences and similarities of attitudes held by revolutionary thinkers of each time period, the merits and detriments of an arts education and the implications of women in education serve as representatives of some of the greatest shifts between the periods.

Contributions of these time periods hold irreplaceable value and obvious implications on the education systems of today; comprehending the vast differences of these two revolutionary time periods gives a great deal of insight regarding perceived values of education and the progression of knowledge within society.