



Bridgewater State University

Virtual Commons - Bridgewater State University

Honors Program Theses and Projects

Undergraduate Honors Program

5-7-2017

The Influence of the Renaissance on Current Teaching Methods

Marissa Balsamo

Follow this and additional works at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj



Part of the [Educational Methods Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Balsamo, Marissa. (2017). The Influence of the Renaissance on Current Teaching Methods. In *BSU Honors Program Theses and Projects*. Item 208. Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/208
Copyright © 2017 Marissa Balsamo

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

The Influence of The Renaissance on Current Teaching Methods

Marissa Balsamo

Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in English

Bridgewater State University

May 7, 2017

Dr. James Crowley, Thesis Director
Dr. Michael McClintock, Committee Member
Dr. John Sexton, Committee Member

Methods of teaching and ideas on the best way to instruct students are forever changing. Although there will always be new studies stating what the preeminent way to teach is, there are several recurring ideas that have been used for many years. The Renaissance was a time period in Europe following the Middle Ages that included a revival of interest in classical ideas. How to approach educating children was a very popular subject, and many writers such as Roger Ascham, Michel de Montaigne, and Thomas Wilson studied and determined the best methods when it came to educational strategies. These Renaissance writers' concepts on instruction show clear influence on our education systems today. Humanism was extremely prevalent in Renaissance education and can also be seen in our current schools. Creating a comfortable and caring environment for learning, allowing students to form their own opinions, differentiated instruction, and the importance of speech as a way to express your knowledge are all topics these authors wrote about that are still important today. Through literature regarding education practices by prominent authors during the Renaissance, it is clear to see that many humanist values are reflected in our schools and education systems today.

The theories and writing produced during the Renaissance were extremely influential throughout all of Europe. During this period of rebirth, one of the main focuses was on humanistic thought along with classical learning values. Humanism was a movement where the focus was on the individual human rather than solely focusing on religious doctrine. Humanist beliefs emphasize the good within human beings, and also focus on everyday human problems and situations. The focus of education was still structured within a curriculum, but also now included a focus on the human as an individual. Educators during the Renaissance were more focused on making each student

the best person that he or she could be. In order to do this, Renaissance authors expressed the importance of teaching students broad ideas and ways to better themselves and their world instead of teaching them concrete beliefs and forming them into people who all think and act the same exact way. The humanist approach allowed students to have individuality and form their own opinions while bettering themselves as people.

Humanism had a very strong impact on education during the Renaissance. Fredrick B. Artz explains the powerful influence humanistic thought had during this educational movement:

The Humanists introduced the idea of a lay morality, which laid stress on ethical conduct as an end in itself. This ideal of lay morality came in alongside the old clerical and monastic views of life. The Humanists increased the sense of the dignity of man and emphasized what man can do for himself. (Artz 88)

Humanists were promoting ethical conduct, as Artz explains. In schools they were not only promoting learning and knowledge, but they were also teaching students how to act in a moral way. Artz continues and explains that this teaching of morality increased a person's sense of dignity along with showing men what they can do for themselves. This all connects back to the focus on the individual and how much ability and potential each individual holds.

Humanism led educators to focus on ancient literature rather than subjects such as logic and metaphysics. As Artz explains, "The Humanists laid emphasis on the study of ancient literature-especially on grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy-rather than on logic, natural history, and metaphysics" (Artz 89). The focus on the

subjects listed by Artz shows the powerful effect Humanism had on education systems. Educators were focusing on subjects such as poetry, rhetoric, and moral philosophy, which are subjects that allow for analysis and discussion. The focus on these subjects relates to the focus on each individual, allowing them to make their own conclusions and form their own opinions on certain topics, as opposed to focusing on subjects with concrete answers. The focus of schools was clearly moving away from rigid ideas and instead allowing students to create their own knowledge and opinions from their own experiences.

The humanistic approach sparked a lot of change in Renaissance schools. Artz discusses the subjects that were focused on in schools:

In trying to define exactly the nature of “Humanism” it is well to recall that the teachers and scholars who began to turn eagerly to the classical past were called, by the students, *umanista* to distinguish them from teachers of other subjects, to whom the terms *legista*, *jurist*, and *canonista* had been applied for several centuries. The term *studia humanitatis*, from which later the term *humanities* was derived, was used by a number of ancient writers, including Cicero. By the first half of the fifteenth century, this term came to stand for a clearly defined series of scholarly subjects, namely, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy as these were set forth by the standard writers of antiquity. (Artz 13)

The term “humanities” stood for all of the subjects that were focused on by teachers in Renaissance education. Subjects like poetry, history, and moral philosophy would allow students to think and focus on their individual opinions regarding these subjects. This

concept in Renaissance education displays clearly the powerful influence Humanism had on Renaissance education.

Humanism during the Renaissance was an essential factor in education becoming so important. In “The Two Cultures and Renaissance Humanism,” Cynthia M. Pyle discusses the background of humanism and its influence during the Renaissance. Pyle states, “By the fifteenth century in Italy we find that these medieval pedagogical divisions have considerably evolved into the *studia humanitatis* (grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy), or what we may begin to call the humanistic studies” (Pyle 126). The studies within the category of humanities were based on subjects that focused on thought. These studies gave students knowledge that would help them in their own individual life experiences as well as helping them in their studies.

Many areas of Europe, one of these being Italy, were greatly affected by the Renaissance way of thinking and teaching. Robert Black explains:

Italy was the most urbanized area of Europe in the Renaissance period with a highly developed commercial and civic life leading to widespread diffusion of education and literacy. The church, dominant in education up to the thirteenth century, became largely redundant by about 1300, and pre-university teaching passed overwhelmingly into secular hands. (Black 570)

This transition away from the religious backbone for learning shows how greatly the Renaissance focused on humanism. Although the church still had control over schools, students were starting to have more room to create their own opinions and beliefs. There was still a religious presence in schools, however the focus on the individual was more

prominent. The focus of humanism was to allow people to form their own beliefs and not force children to have certain opinions or mold their minds. Humanism allowed students to develop their own opinions instead of always being given information to memorize. This memorization did not stop, but there was a new appearance of the opportunity for a student to have his or her own opinions and beliefs as well. The education system's movement away from the church shows the power that humanism had on schools in the Renaissance.

Although authors of the Renaissance focused on humanism and working to better each individual, it is important to remember that the opportunity to learn and gain an education was not given to every single child during this time period. Most students were hand picked from childhood to be granted the privilege of receiving an education. Roger Ascham, an English scholar, explains his disagreement with this practice in his text *The Scholemaster*. Ascham explains, "Thies yong scholers be chosen commonlie, as yong apples be chosen by children" (Ascham). The education discussed by Ascham and other Renaissance authors was not given to everyone, but was only given to those selected at a young age for particular promise. Ascham explains his disagreement with this practice:

For verie greaf of harte I will not applie the similitude: but hereby, is plainlie seen, how learning is robbed of hir best wittes, first by the great beating, and after by the ill chosing of scholers, to go to the universities. Whereof cummeth partelie, that lewde and spitefull prouerbe, sounding to the greate hurte of learning, and shame of learned men, that, the greatest Clerkes be not the wisest men. (Ascham)

The boys chosen to be sent off to university and given the opportunity to gain an education were chosen at a young age. Although the Renaissance benefitted our education systems by illuminating some very influential teaching practices, there were also downfalls, such as the fact that not everyone had the privilege of receiving this education. Although the movement was not overnight and it took time for the ideas to be accepted by most people, the education movement of the Renaissance was still extremely influential.

During the Renaissance, the importance of the classroom being a caring and comfortable environment for the student was promoted. Ascham discusses in great detail how important it is for a teacher to make sure that a student is comfortable in the classroom. Ascham explains the best learning occurs when students are comfortable and content in their environment. Ascham explains in his preface, “M. Wotton, A man milde of nature, with soft voice, and few words, inclined to M. Secretaries iudgement, and said, in mine opinion, the Scholehouse should be in deede, as it is called by name, the house of playe and pleasure, and not of feare and bondage: and as I do remember, so saith Socrates in one place of Plato” (Ascham). Ascham is explaining that when a student comes to school, they should be relaxed and contented. With a student being content, he or she will not have any worries or distractions and all of their focus can go into their learning. If the schoolhouse were a place of fear and bondage, students’ thoughts would be preoccupied with fear and worry and they would not be able to focus on their learning. Ascham explains this important idea as being said by a man of mild nature with a soft voice. A person with a mild nature and soft voice would only say something if he or she believed it to be truly important, which illuminates how strongly Ascham felt about the

classroom being a comfortable environment. This statement is the beginning of Ascham's explanation of why a classroom should in fact be a caring environment.

Ascham makes many points to highlight his argument that the classroom should be a caring environment. If the classroom is not a comfortable environment the students may be too nervous to ask questions. This tension will lead to a block in their learning. To avoid this, teachers should strive to create this caring environment. Ascham explains:

Let your Scholer be neuer afraide, to aske you any dout, but use discretlie the best allurements ye can, to encourage him to the same: lest, his ouermoch fearing of you, driue him to seeke some disorderlie shifte: as, to seeke to be helped by some other booke, or to be prompted by some other Scholer, and so goe aboute to begile you moch, and him selfe more.

(Ascham)

Although it is important for a student to learn on his or her own, the student needs to feel comfortable with his or her teacher in order for this to happen. Ascham believes a teacher should be approachable, but the teachers should not be handing out information and students should be driven to learn on their own. If students are afraid of their teacher, however, they will never ask questions and knowledge they cannot find on their own will go unknown. Ascham that small acts from a teacher such as praising a student for good work will create a connection and a trust between the teacher and student that will make the student comfortable with their teacher.

Ascham directly discusses the beating of children in classrooms, and explains his disagreement with this practice:

For commonlie, many scholemasters, some, as I have seen, moe, as I have heard tell, be of so crooked a nature, as, when they meete with a hard witted scholer, they rather breake him, than bowe him, rather marre him, then mend him. For whan the scholemaster is angrie with some other matter, then will he sonest faul to beate his scholer: and though he him selfe should be punished for his folie, yet must he beate some scholer for his pleasure: though there be no cause for him to do so, nor yet fault in the scholer to deserue so. (Ascham)

Even today, some students are more difficult to teach than others and some are less interested in learning. When this occurs or when a student is acting out, scholemasters during the time of Ascham's writing believed it was acceptable to beat students. A crucial line in this section of Ascham's writing states, "when they meete with a hard witted scholer, they rather breake him, than bow him, rather marre him, then mend him." Instead of helping the student and working with them to fix the problem, they are hurting the student. Hurting the student will lead to fear, which as Ascham explained earlier, will cause him or her to not be focused on learning. This connects back to his desire for a comfortable classroom. The teacher showing their concern, instead of further breaking the student down, will likely help the student to improve and better themselves along with being more comfortable with their teacher, therefore being more apt to learn.

Ascham continues his argument that teachers beating their students will not help the student attain knowledge. Ascham states, "I said somewhat farder in the matter, how, and whie, yong children, were soner allured by love, than driven by beating, to atteyne good learning" (Ascham). A teacher creating a caring relationship with his or her student

will prompt the student to learn. If the student sits in the classroom in fear of being beaten, he or she will struggle to pay attention and therefore will be unable to attain knowledge. Ascham also states, “No learning ought to be learned with bondage”. If the student feels bondage, as Ascham explains, this will hinder his or her learning. Throughout his writing, Ascham displays a clear theme in his belief that a classroom should be a comfortable learning environment.

About ten years after Ascham, Michel De Montaigne, a French philosopher of the Renaissance, showed ideas similar to those of Ascham in his piece “Of the Education of Children.” Montaigne touches upon the idea of a caring and comfortable classroom environment, and when discussing the caring learning setting he states, “I have always disliked the discipline of most of our schools. They might have erred less harmfully by leaning toward indulgence. They are a real jail of captive youth” (Montaigne 26). Montaigne, like Ascham, expresses his belief that school systems during this time period were too disciplined. These extremely disciplined and restraining classrooms did nothing to positively affect students and their learning. Montaigne shows his belief that leaning towards indulgence and showing more lenience when students acted out, as Ascham explained, would show students that their teachers are there to help them not to hurt them.

Montaigne agreed with Ascham in the fact that a tense and restraining classroom would in no way help students in improving their education. Montaigne discusses this at several other points within “On the Education of Children.” Montaigne states, “For among other things he had been advised to teach me to enjoy knowledge and duty by my own free will and desire, and to educate my mind in all gentleness and freedom without

rigor and constraint” (Montaigne 31). Montaigne illuminates the importance of a student holding the desire to learn. If you create an environment that takes the joy out of learning, students will lose their desire to learn and the joy knowledge can bring them will also be taken away. This all circles back to the common Renaissance desire for a less tense and restraining classroom. There is clear agreement throughout Renaissance writing that teachers should not be harming their students, but helping them and showing their students that they care about their success.

Even today it is still extremely important for teachers to create a caring environment on an emotional level for their students. There are many current studies that highlight the importance of a teacher making his or her classroom a comfortable environment and how this is essential to student’s learning. Although students may not have fear at school, every student is different and some may struggle with issues at home, which is why this caring environment is so crucial. In an article by Lachel Story and Janie Butts, the authors discuss creating a caring learning environment. Story and Butts state, “Compelling teaching begins with teachers conveying genuine caring for student and their learning experience. Students have an innate need and desire for their teacher to care for them” (Story and Butts). This statement relates clearly back to when Ascham discussed the importance of helping a student rather than hurting them. Showing students you care about them and their learning as a teacher will compel them to excel in the classroom.

Story and Butts continue explaining their emphasis on a caring classroom and discuss specific ways that a teacher can create a caring environment, “Other caring acts teachers can foster include having an open-door policy, being fair, and celebrating small

accomplishments” (Story and Butts). All of these traits would help to make students more comfortable with their teachers along with feeling appreciated. The authors continue, “Asking and valuing students’ opinions on classroom approaches, activities, and policies conveys caring . . . Another ingredient of caring is fairness, which means treating all students exactly the same. Students will feel a sense of caring because they will have the comfort of knowing they are equal representatives with equal opportunities” (Story and Butts). In order to be a caring teacher, it is important to show the same amount of compassion to all students. Ascham displays this same idea when he discusses the importance of all students having the opportunity to learn.

One of the reasons Renaissance writers such as Ascham felt that a caring classroom was so important was because of the focus on humanism. Renaissance educators were greatly focused on the individual; therefore teachers would be focused on making their students the best individuals they could be. The focus on having a caring classroom is clearly still present in classrooms today. In “The Benefits of Using Sociodrama in the Elementary Classroom: Promoting Caring Relationships Among Educators and Students,” Deanna Pecaski highlights some important information on the caring classroom. She states, “Educational environments should exist as places that nurture and celebrate student individuality as preparation for a lifetime of learning and existing cooperatively in complex society” (Pecaski 451). Not only will a caring classroom promote learning, but it will also help to build students into caring people in the future, which will allow them to work well as adults in society. This focus on humanism is clearly carried from Renaissance education all the way to school systems today.

There have been several recent educational studies that examine relationships between students and teachers. Nora Alder explains in her article “Interpretations of the Meaning of Care,” a study that examines how students unanimously express the fact that having a caring teacher promotes their motivation to complete their schoolwork. Within the review of literature regarding this topic in her article, Alder states, “The teacher who is interested in shaping a caring and altruistic person has to model the behavior that is subjectively deemed appropriate in interaction with students” (Alder 243). This statement relates directly to humanism and the notion for a caring classroom during the Renaissance. During the Renaissance, the focus was on the individual person as seen through humanism. Teachers in the Renaissance and today play a crucial role in shaping a child into the person they will grow up to be. Having this role, it is important to show care and demonstrate what a caring and authentic person should act like.

Along with showing students what it looks like to be a caring person, a teacher with a caring classroom has also proved to motivate students in their learning. Alder reflects on a study by Deborah R. Dillon, which examines research on care in schools: “Several studies that examined student perceptions noted the value students place on caring as a teacher attribute. Students said they worked harder when they perceived that their teachers cared about them personally and academically. Students in Dillon’s (1989) investigation attributed the relaxed atmosphere of the classroom, the teacher’s sense of humor, and high expectations for students to be contributing factors in their perceptions of their teacher as caring” (Alder 244-245). Students are more motivated to excel in a classroom when they feel their teacher is caring and has a genuine concern for their success. Alder continues, “Teachers they saw as caring were attentive to individual

student's needs and enjoyed helping students. Furthermore, caring teachers were involved, polite, and concerned with student success" (Alder 245). Ascham continuously explained to his reader that instead of tearing a student down, the schoolmaster should be building the student up and showing the genuine concern they have for the students learning. The caring classroom is a recurring theme that shows the correlation between a caring teacher and a successful student. Alder continues with her own study in urban schools to verify the claims made by the studies previously discussed. After the study, Alder determined care to be a work ethic. Alder referring to her own study states, "Students almost unanimously agreed that teachers who pressured students to complete assignments and study were caring teachers . . . both teachers were considered to be strict, concerned with their students' academic success, and caring by the majority of students in the study" (Alder 250-251). Through this study, it is clear that students react well to a caring teacher, leading them to focus more on their schoolwork and achieving success.

Along with a caring classroom, the opportunity for students to formulate their own opinions was becoming evident during the Renaissance. The role of a teacher is very complex in many aspects. One area that a teacher may find difficulty in is allowing students to form their own opinions, rather than the teacher forcing their own opinions on the student. When teaching, it is important to not mold students and force them to hold certain beliefs. Teachers need to be cautious and leave room for students to create their own opinions, which will help students grow as individuals. This idea is seen through Renaissance authors such as Michel de Montaigne in "Of the Education of Children."

Throughout his essay, Montaigne explains the difficulty of educating children and then proceeds to discuss how to best go about this challenging task.

Along with making important statements regarding the caring classroom, Montaigne also makes multiple claims that do not support molding students to hold certain beliefs. Montaigne instead proposes guiding students toward forming their own opinions. This relates back to humanism and the focus on the individual. Each individual person is unique and will hold his or her own opinions; therefore it is important to allow students to form their own views. Montaigne states, “my advice is to guide them always to the best and most profitable things, and to pay little heed to those trivial conjectures and prognostications which we make from the actions of their childhood” (Montaigne 11). Montaigne advises teachers to guide their students and keep the humanistic ideals in mind while leading them to make the correct choices. Montaigne wants teachers to help their students understand important morals, but to avoid controversial and opinionated topics. Staying away from opinionated topics will help teachers avoid influencing students to believe certain things, allowing students more space to form their own beliefs and opinions.

Montaigne makes several other points regarding the role of teachers and the importance of giving their students enough room to make their own opinions. Memorization was still occurring in ways such as having students memorize passages from the Bible. However some teachers were taking memorization too far and forcing students to memorize and accept their own personal beliefs. Montaigne states, “Our tutors never stop bawling into our ears, as though they are pouring water into a funnel; and our task is only to repeat what they told us” (Montaigne 12). As a tutor or teacher, it is

important not to drill information into the student's minds or make them memorize the information and move forward. Teachers were forcing students to memorize, instead of allowing them to think. This forced memorization of facts and opinions would not allow students to excel as individuals. The movement being presented by Montaigne is students should not be formed and molded to believe certain things but instead taught crucial knowledge, and then form their own opinions.

An analogy displaying the similarity between students and bees in "Of the Education of Children" illuminates Montaigne's belief that students need to be given the space to formulate their own decisions and opinions. Montaigne explains:

The bees plunder the flowers here and there, but afterward they make of them honey, which is all theirs; it is no longer thyme or marjoram. Even so with the pieces borrowed from others; he will transform and blend them to make a work that is his own, to wit, his judgment. His education, work, and study aim only at forming this. (Montaigne 14)

Montaigne believes that students should treat knowledge in the same way that bees treat honey. Students should listen to different theories or studies, and then formulate their own opinions from what they have heard. This opinion will be formulated on their own, highlighting the idea of individuality. Although the student is taking bits and pieces of what he has heard from others, he is still processing this knowledge and making his own judgments.

Montaigne clearly illustrates his point that a teacher should not completely mold a student, but should instead be a guide. He states, "Our mind moves only on faith, being bound and constrained to the whim of others' fancies, a slave and a captive under the

authority of their teaching. We have been so well accustomed to leading strings that we have no free motion left; our vigor and liberty are extinct” (Montaigne 13). Montaigne describes students as being captive and slaves to their teachers in some situations. A student during the Renaissance may have had no choice than to believe what their tutor was teaching them because they may not have known any other way. These students are described as having no free motion, almost as if the students are puppets being formed to think and act in a certain way. Lastly, Montaigne explains that he believes after getting an education a student’s liberty is extinct. All of this evidence confirms Montaigne’s belief that teachers need to be more of a guide to their students and enforce the humanistic beliefs, allowing students to grow as individuals and form their own beliefs and opinions.

Scholars who study the Renaissance, like Artz, have also made claims regarding the importance of allowing students the freedom to create their own individual thoughts and beliefs. Artz explains, “In secondary education, the Humanists rejected the great rigid and closed systems of Scholastic thought, and substituted for them a knowledge derived from concrete and worldly experience. Humanism thus stimulated critical attitudes, and freed minds which refused to be bound by old systems and were prepared to accept new ideas and new experiences” (Artz 89). Advocates of humanism did not agree with the strict and concrete education systems prior to the changes that came during the Renaissance. Schools were extremely harsh and did not involve a lot of individuality and instead required a great amount of memorization. The focus on the individual is again seen when Artz explains that Renaissance educators began to enforce knowledge that came from worldly experience.

Montaigne's letter promoting the teacher as a guide as well as Artz' acknowledgement of the impact humanism had on students individuality has clear influence on today's education systems through an approach referred to as guided learning. Guided learning is an approach in which teachers give their students just the right amount of information to learn, but give them freedom to form this knowledge on their own. This is extremely similar to the idea Montaigne expressed where he stressed the importance of the teacher as a guide. In guided learning, teachers present a lesson or a problem that has just enough information to allow the student to form an answer to the problem on their own. This allows students to have some help, but still be able to learn on their own. This relates directly to Montaigne's proposed movement for the teacher to avoid drilling information into the students mind, and instead allowing them to learn and excel on their own while working as a guide. Guided learning also encourages teachers to only interfere when a student is stuck, giving the student the opportunity to come to a conclusion or answer on their own before interfering. This clearly reflects Montaigne's indication that memorization should be limited and a teacher should guide their students learning, allowing them to form ideas and knowledge on their own. Students working to create their own knowledge will also help them as individuals which again shows clear reflection of the humanistic approach of the Renaissance.

There are several studies that show the positive effects of guided learning in the classroom. Hushman and Marley's article, "Guided Instruction Improves Elementary Student Learning," refers to theorists who support guided learning and explains the benefits of this approach. The authors state:

Learning theorists who advocate that teachers provide no or very minimal instructional guidance often refer to these strategies as discovery learning. These theorists propose that robust learning occurs when students construct knowledge from their own unique experiences. Accordingly, learners in discovery learning contexts are asked to construct target knowledge or procedures while involved in the solving of authentic problems, with the expectation that searching for and creating solutions while solving authentic problems will lead to deeper conceptual understanding (Hushman and Marley 371).

Many influential educational theorists support the notion of guided learning. This style not only allows the student to obtain knowledge, but to grow as a person as well, because they are not just being handed the information and being told to memorize it. Instead they are attaining this knowledge on their own.

One highly influential educational theorist whose writing and beliefs are very similar to the educational views of Montaigne is Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky's idea of scaffolding is very closely related to Montaigne's desire for teachers to not force information on students but instead guide them to gain knowledge on their own. The Zone of Proximal Development is the concept that when a student is at a certain stage, giving them a small amount of help will give the student enough support to take their learning and comprehension to another level. This small amount of help the teacher gives the student is what is referred to as scaffolding. Once the students complete this assignment with scaffolding, they will soon be able to complete more challenging assignments with no help at all. The goal is to provide enough help to students to make sure they are learning, similar to Montaigne's idea of the teacher as a guide. Giving

students space in their learning will give them the tools to figure things out on their own and be able to complete these tasks more than once. The theory of scaffolding has teachers or tutors observe the students learning and give them assistance to reach their learning goals based on how well they are picking up the information on their own. It is important, as humanistic writers explained, to focus on the individual and their unique learning methods. Doing so will allow teachers to work as a guide to help students excel on their own.

Montaigne and his educational theories have clear influence on our education systems today. Along with the teacher acting as a guide, Montaigne expressed other ideas in his writing of “On the Education of Children” that have clear influence on our current education practices. One of these ideas is the method today referred to as differentiated instruction. Although Montaigne may have not called his proposals “differentiated instruction,” the core principle of this theory ties clearly back to the writing of Montaigne. The idea of differentiated instruction is that each student learns differently, and it is important to make sure your method of teaching information allows all students to understand each lesson. It is clear that the principals of “differentiated instruction” are rooted in Montaigne’s theories on education.

Montaigne expresses an awareness that all students learn at different paces. He also grasps the fact that it is important to make sure a teacher, is meeting the needs of all of his or her students. Montaigne states, “If, as is our custom, the teachers undertake to regulate many minds of such different capacities and forms with the same lesson and a similar measure of guidance, it is no wonder if in a whole race of children they find barely two or three who reap any proper fruit from their teaching” (Montaigne 261-266).

Here, Montaigne is saying that as a teacher it is not appropriate to teach a lesson one way and expect every student to understand what is being taught. As Montaigne explains, if you only teach one way, many students may not understand the lesson and only two or three students might grasp what the teacher attempting to teach them. As a result of this knowledge, it is important to differentiate instruction. A teacher is encouraged to teach in many different ways in order to meet the needs of all of his or her students. Montaigne clearly had grasped the idea that all students have different learning styles and obtain knowledge differently.

Montaigne, understanding that all students have different learning styles, shows his consistent connection to the humanistic values. Each student is unique and has his or her own individual learning styles, and this concept connects back to humanism because of the focus on the individual. Montaigne begins acknowledging this idea that all students learn differently:

It is good that he should have his pupil trot before him, to judge the child's pace and how much he must stoop to match his strength. For lack of this proportion we spoil everything; and to be able to hit it right and to go along in it evenly is one of the hardest tasks that I know; it is the achievement of a lofty and very strong soul to know how to come down to a childish gait and guide it. (Montaigne 12)

Although this section connects to the previous idea of the teacher as a guide, it also illuminates key factors in the idea of differentiated instruction for each individual student. In judging the student's pace, the teacher gains knowledge of how the student learns. Montaigne expresses the difficulty of finding the learning style of each student, and

although difficult it is crucial to know this when planning how to teach each student. It is important to see through the child's point of view and for the teachers to ask themselves if the way they are teaching will allow the student to be capable of grasping the information.

Current educational studies show an extremely strong focus and support for differentiated instruction. Holli M. Levy explains in her article, "Meeting the Needs of All Students through Differentiated Instruction," the concept of differentiated instruction along with why it is so important in classrooms. It is important now, and was equally as important during the Renaissance, that students grasp and comprehend the content they are expected to learn in the classroom. Levy continues to explain the concept of differentiated instruction. Levy states:

Teachers differentiate when they give a student more time to finish an assignment, allow children choice in what they read, give different types of assessments, and myriad other ways . . . Differentiated instruction is a set of strategies that will help teachers meet each child where they are when they enter class and move them forward as far as possible on their educational path. (Levy 162)

Differentiated instruction shows clear roots back to the Renaissance, as the focus on the individual is illuminated through this method. It is important, now as it was during the Renaissance, to make sure all students understand what is being taught. However, not all students will attain this knowledge the same way. All students have their own individual and unique way of learning and teachers need to adhere to this in their instruction.

Levi continues her discussion on differentiated instruction, and consistently highlights the importance of this concept. Levi discusses the pressure on the teacher to make sure to understand the different learning styles of each of his or her students. Levi explains:

Students do not all learn the same way, so we cannot teach them all the same way. We have to adjust our teaching style to reflect the needs of our students. To do this, we must find out where our students are when they come into the process and build on their prior knowledge to advance their learning...Students will need different levels of support that can be determined through formative assessment. (Levy 162)

Understanding each student's starting point and how he or she work as a learner is crucial to having a positive impact as a teacher. It is important, like Montaigne and Levy stated, to adjust teaching styles to make sure each of the needs of the students in the classroom is met.

Along with Montaigne and Levy, Howard Garner is an educational theorist who also believed that students were all unique in their learning styles. Garner took this a step further, and created what is known as "The Theory of Multiple Intelligences." A summary of the multiple intelligences at Northern Illinois University contends, "These intelligences (or competencies) relate to a person's unique aptitude set of capabilities and ways they might prefer to demonstrate intellectual abilities" (1). These intelligences label how a person might take in knowledge best and what type of lessons a teacher should use to reach the needs of each individual student. Garner's "Multiple Intelligences" began as a list of six intelligences and now the list has grown to nine

intelligences. The nine intelligences include verbal-linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial-visual intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligences, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligences, naturalist intelligence, and existential intelligence. Each of these intelligences not only describes how a student would learn best, but their strengths and what types of lessons would help them excel.

Through Garner's "Multiple Intelligence Theory," a teacher would be taking into account each student's strengths in learning and as a result targeting their lesson to work with these strengths. For example, student's who corresponds to the verbal-linguistic intelligence holds sensitivity to the sounds, meanings and rhythms or words. For these students, putting information into a poem or rhyme would help them learn and obtain this information. However, a student who holds the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence has the ability to control one's body movements and to handle objects skillfully. This student would learn well with an academic game that may involve obtaining knowledge along with physical activity. Although every learning intelligence is unique from the other, awareness of each of these is crucial. Formulating lessons to meet the needs of all types of learners and every intelligence will help each student understand the information the teacher is attempting to teach. Montaigne's acknowledgment that each student learns differently has been carried over from the Renaissance to education theorists today and has become more detailed.

Differentiated instruction is encouraged for all age groups when it comes to learning. Shayne B. Piasta, in her article titled, "Moving To Assessment-Guided Differentiated Instruction," explains the powerful impact differentiated instruction can

have to one of the first things children learn in school, the alphabet. Piasta explains the importance of differentiated instruction in alphabet instruction. The use of differentiated instruction is seen here with spelling, which is taught at such a young age but is also very important to each child's education. Piasta explains, "Given the evidence that alphabet knowledge is related to both differences across children and differences across letters, early childhood educators are encouraged to use assessment-guided differentiated instruction to support children's letter name and sound development rather than traditional one-size-fits-all whole-class approaches" (Piasta 206). Piasta encourages teachers to avoid one-size-fits-all instruction in a classroom. Teaching students in the same way, like Montaigne said, will only allow a certain amount of students to obtain the information that is being taught. It is important to present the information in different ways so every student has a chance to see it in a new way and grasp the knowledge.

At the conclusion, Piasta reinforces the powerful impact of differentiated instruction. Piasta explains, "The framework presented above encourages early childhood educators to use assessment and intentional differentiated instruction to support the diverse alphabet learning needs of children in their classrooms" (Piasta 209). In each classroom, no matter what subject is being taught there will always be students with diverse learning needs and different intelligences. Being aware of this, as a teacher, is something Montaigne explained in the Renaissance that is still prevalent today. A teacher knowing each of their students learning needs will help them present information in different ways to make sure each student has the opportunity to completely grasp what is being taught.

From the Renaissance to today, many tasks traditionally assigned to a teacher have remained the same. Teachers have consistently been expected to make a caring learning environment, to guide rather than molding students, and to understand that each student's learning needs are unique and therefore use differentiated instruction. Along with the role of the teacher, the importance and emphasis on base-line learning and crucial subjects for students has remained the same. In the Renaissance, the importance of rhetoric instruction is displayed within the writing of authors such as Thomas Wilson. Rhetoric was a crucial subject for students to excel in during the Renaissance, and this has carried over to schools today.

Thomas Wilson goes into great detail in *The Art of Rhetoric* to explain the importance of speech. Wilson not only explains the power of speech, but the meaning of Rhetoric as well. Rhetoric is defined by Wilson as “an art to set forth by utterance of words, matter at large, or (as Cicero doth say) it is a learned, or rather an artificial declaration of the mind in the handling of any cause called in contention that may through reason largely be discussed” (Wilson). It is the ability of a person to use language and be persuasive. At any time when a debate or discussion is occurring, a person who has learned how to correctly and powerfully use rhetoric will have the ability to successfully contribute his or her own knowledge and opinion to the discussion. Rhetoric, as Wilson explained, is something that is learned. In order to express everything the student has learned in school, he or she needs the power of language and rhetoric to express this knowledge clearly. Without this ability to share ideas in a way any audience will understand, all of the learning a student has gained in school will go unknown.

One aspect of the Renaissance that Wilson continuously shares is the power of speech. Wilson discusses the gift of speech and the best ways that a man can utilize this gift. Wilson explains the value of speech, “And gave his appointed ministers knowledge both to see the natures of men, and also granted them the gift of utterance, that they might win folk at their will, and frame them by reason to all good order” (Wilson). Wilson explaining that speech is a gift given by God places an elevated value on speech. Something that is considered a gift from God is not only valued, but should be taken advantage of. Thomas Wilson sees the true value of speech and its ability to allow men to express their thoughts and beliefs, and this is continuously expressed through his writing.

Rhetoric is extremely important because it gives students the ability to express what they have learned in the classroom. However, rhetoric is also something that involved a lot of practice in classrooms. Wilson discusses the importance of practice, which is similar to important ideas in our current education systems. Wilson addresses the importance of practicing rhetoric. He states, “For though he have a wit and learning together, yet shall they both little avail without much practice” (Wilson). Although students would gain intelligence in school, it is very important to practice expressing this knowledge through speech. None of the learning and wit students would gain in school could be shown without knowing the principals of rhetoric.

Wilson’s writing also explains the traits required of a good speaker, or orator. In order to be considered a powerful orator, the speaker must have the ability to teach, to delight, and to persuade. Wilson writes, “The tongue is ordained to express the mind, that one may understand an other’s meaning” (Wilson). The ability to speak and express your own ideas allows a person to express their own beliefs to others in a way that would

allow the audience to understand. Wilson continues discussing the important factors to keep in mind when speaking to an audience, “The next part that he hath to play is to cheer his guests and to make them take pleasure with hearing of things wittily devised and pleasantly set forth” (Wilson). When expressing your opinions to others, it is important to speak in a way that engages the audience. Engaging the listeners will keep them attentive and result in the audience considering the ideas the speaker is explaining. This notion is still important today in any type of verbal presentation where a person is attempting to share his or her beliefs or knowledge with others. Wilson’s focus on rhetoric shows current education principles rooted in the Renaissance.

Fredrick B. Artz analyzed a school directed by Guarino da Verona at the Este Court at Ferrara and makes many regarding the importance of speech. One humanist wrote about Ferrara’s school:

We must add to our knowledge the power of expression. These two sides of learning should not be separated: they afford mutual aid and distinction. Proficiency in literary form, not accompanied by broad acquaintance with facts and truths, is a barren attainment; while information, however vast, which lacks all grace of expression, would seem to be put under a bushel of partly thrown away. (Artz 41)

A crucial component of a person’s knowledge and education is the ability to express what they know. Being able to discuss knowledge and talk to other scholars was something humanists valued. Knowledge and speech go hand in hand, without speech a person’s knowledge would go unknown. Speech allows each person’s perspective to be heard.

The powerful impact speech had during the Renaissance was not only seen in school, but it was seen after students left school as well. When Artz explains the age of academics and humanist's impact on this period, he describes other ways humanism was spread. Artz states, "In the fifteenth century are found the first gatherings of Humanist scholars-half learned societies and half literary clubs-to listen to speeches and to discuss common problems" (Artz 42). Not only in the classroom but also in groups created by scholars was humanism present. Groups of people were meeting to simply have discussions focused on the human and the individual, allowing each member to express their own individual thoughts through speech. These groups, explained by Artz, display how the impact of humanism and the revival of people creating and sharing their own opinions were apparent inside and outside of the classroom.

Current studies on presentations and public speaking in classrooms show that public speaking is still important in classrooms today. Many schools state in their curricular frameworks the need for students to have public speaking skills. Janet Boyce discusses steps teachers can take in order to make sure their students reach their full potential in the area of public speaking. Boyce indicates why each student gaining the confidence to speak publically is important, "For many students, however, the need for public speaking skills extends beyond the classroom. The confidence gained through public speaking in class transfers to other situations, such as drama, debate, music, sports, and academic or social clubs. Additionally, many employers will expect their employees to have proficient speaking skills" (Boyce 142). The ability to speak and express your knowledge is crucial. Boyce explains that the ability to speak publically goes much further than the classroom, as it is a skill that students can use throughout their whole

lives. A student having this ability to share their knowledge as well as the ability to communicate clearly with others is something that was valued during the Renaissance and is still valued today.

Having the ability to speak, as stated by Renaissance authors, allows students to share their knowledge. Boyce explains how the focus and attention on public speaking is nation wide. Boyce states, “Many state standards and curriculum frameworks emphasize the need for students to develop the communication skills of public speaking, listening, and responding appropriately” (Boyce 147). The focus on enhancing student’s oral skills is mirrored today from the ideas of Renaissance authors. A student’s ability to share knowledge with his or her peers is a lifelong skill all students will use often. The ability to clearly verbalize information and be able to clearly express ideas is just as important as the knowledge a person holds was seen clearly in the Renaissance and is still apparent today.

Today, authors continue to analyze the importance of gaining public speaking skills in the classroom. This is a skill that will help students throughout their entire lives, according to Steven Grubaugh in his discussion on public speaking. He believes it is best to face the common fears of speaking and overcome them to gain a voice and ability to speak to others in the classroom. Grubaugh states, “The classroom is the best place to treat mild to moderate speech anxiety and to learn speaking skill” (Grubaugh). Grubaugh continues explaining the benefits of public speaking and explains how speaking skills go hand in hand with traditionally taught writing skills. Grubaugh’s claim that the ability to speak is equally as important as the ability to write and hold knowledge is similar to that

of Wilson. This idea and equal importance between writing and speaking skills was seen in the Renaissance and is valued in schools today.

Many of the teaching principals introduced in the Renaissance along with the core value of humanism are seen in current education practices. The education system in Europe was greatly changed as a result of the Renaissance movement. Topics introduced in the work of Roger Ascham, Michel de Montaigne, and Thomas Wilson are clearly seen in our education systems today. Ascham presented the importance of a caring classroom, and recent studies show the continuing benefits of a caring learning environment. The importance of allowing students' to form his or her own opinions rather than relying on memorization was addressed by Montaigne. Montaigne also stated the importance of a teacher acting as a guide rather than forcing opinions on his or her students. Current education theorists, such as Lev Vygotsky in his Zone of Proximal Development, reflect the concepts presented by Montaigne in the Renaissance. Other current theories such as differentiated instruction, explained by Howard Garner, have clear roots in the Renaissance as well. The importance of knowing each students individual learning style was and still is important today. Lastly, Wilson's emphasis on the importance of rhetoric is seen currently through constant practice of speech in ways such as classroom presentations.

Along with the four topics emphasized by Ascham, Wilson, and Montaigne in the Renaissance, the core value of humanism is also seen in current educational approaches. Humanism helped influence a revival of education systems and teaching methods. Humanism sparked a renewal in the education systems by showing the benefits of focusing on subjects where students could create their own opinions. This allowed

teachers to focus on and better each individual, as opposed to forcing each student to memorize information. Although the Renaissance educational reform was not accepted by everyone at first and did not occur over night, its long lasting influence is clear. The concepts presented in the Renaissance sparked changes in our education systems that have been extremely beneficial. Our education systems reflect a variety of aspects that were brought to light during the Renaissance. The concepts presented during the Renaissance are still valued today and have positively impacted the teachers and students of our current education systems.

Works Consulted

- Alder, Nora. "Interpretations of the Meaning of Care: Creating Caring Relationships in Urban Middle School Classrooms." *Urban Education*, vol. 37, no. 2, Mar. 2002, p. 241. EBSCOhost, login.libserv-prd.bridgew.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?
- Artz, Fredrick B. *Renaissance Humanism 1300-1550*. The Kent State University Press, 1966.
- Ascham, Roger. "The Scholemaster." *Luminarium*, 1998, <http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/ascham1.htm>. Accessed 19 Apr. 2017.
- Black, Robert. "A Renaissance Education: Schooling in Bergamo and the Venetian Republic, 1500-1650." *History of Education*, vol. 41, no. 4, July 2012, pp. 569-572. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/0046760X.2012.680925.
- Boyce, Janet S., et al. "Fearless public speaking: oral presentation activities for the elementary classroom." *Childhood Education*, vol. 83, no. 3, 2007, p. 142+. *Educators Reference Complete*, login.libserv-prd.bridgew.edu/login?url=http://go.galegroup.com/libserv-prd.bridgew.edu/ps/i.do?p=PROF&sw=w&u=mlin_s_bridcoll&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA160104144&asid=1a815a2ee14b1d7263d90b82833bfb86. Accessed 11 Apr. 2017.
- Grubaugh, Steven. "Public Speaking." *Clearing House*, vol. 63, no. 6, Feb. 1990, p. 255. EBSCOhost, login.libserv-

prd.bridgew.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&d
b=aph&AN=9705100326&site=ehost-live

Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences: 1-9. Northern Illinois University.

Web. 19 Apr. 2017.

<http://www.niu.edu/facdev/_pdf/guide/learning/howard_gardner_theory_multiple_intelligences.pdf>.

Hushman, Carolyn J. and Scott C. Marley. "Guided Instruction Improves Elementary Student Learning and Self-Efficacy in Science." *Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 108, no. 5, Sept. 2015, pp. 371-381. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/00220671.2014.899958.

Levy, Holli M. "Meeting the Needs of All Students through Differentiated Instruction: Helping Every Child Reach and Exceed Standards." *Clearing House*, vol. 81, no. 4, Mar/Apr2008, pp. 161-164. EBSCOhost, login.libserv-prd.bridgew.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&d
b=aph&AN=31395463&site=ehost-live.

Montaigne, Michel De. "Of the Education of Children." Ed. Donald M. Frame. *Selections from the Essays Montaigne*. New York: Crofts Classics, 1948. 6-33. Print.

Pecaski McLennan, Deanna. "The Benefits of Using Sociodrama in the Elementary Classroom: Promoting Caring Relationships among Educators and Students." *Early Childhood Education Journal*, vol. 35, no. 5, Apr. 2008, pp. 451-456. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1007/s10643-007-0195-2.

Piasta, Shayne B. "Moving to Assessment-Guided Differentiated Instruction to Support Young Children's Alphabet Knowledge." *Reading Teacher*, vol. 68, no. 3, Nov. 2014, pp. 202-211. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1002/trtr.1316.

Pyle, Cynthia M. "The Two Cultures and Renaissance Humanism." *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, vol. 33, no. 2, June 2008, pp. 121-133. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1179/030801808X259781.

Story, Lachel and Janie B. Butts. "Compelling Teaching with the Four Cs: Caring, Comedy, Creativity, and Challenging." *Journal of Nursing Education*, Vol. 49, Issue 5, May 2010, p291. EBSCOhost

Wilson, Thomas. "The Arte of Rhetorique." *Luminarium*, September 1998, <http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/arte/arte.htm>. Accessed 19 Apr. 2017.