

Lesson: Cornelia Connelly and Education Reform

1840s: Background information

Reforming Education: What was going on at the time (1830s and 40s)

A wave of religious fervor, the Second Great Awakening, influenced many social causes, such as the temperance movement. Reforms in education led to greater access to education for women, African Americans, and people with disabilities

Problems in education at the time: poorly trained teachers, poorly funded schools, opposition to compulsory education, few educational opportunities for African Americans or women, problem of teaching students with disabilities

Normal school: trained high school graduates to be teachers

Horace Mann:

disuse of corporal punishment in school discipline

In 1838, he founded and edited *The Common School Journal*.

The six main principles were: (1) the public should no longer remain ignorant; (2) that such education should be paid for, controlled, and sustained by an interested public; (3) that this education will be best provided in schools that embrace children from a variety of backgrounds; (4) that this education must be non-sectarian; (5) that this education must be taught by the spirit, methods, and discipline of a free society; and (6) that education should be provided by well-trained, professional teachers. Mann worked for more and better equipped school houses, longer school years (until 16 years old), higher pay for teachers, and a wider curriculum.

What Cornelia Said: from the Book of Studies

Cornelia's education of teachers:

- "Pupil teachers": middle class students who learned by teaching younger students
- "Book of Studies" was instruction for teachers in her schools, detailed instructions for teachers not under her direct supervision (similar to other books of the time for teacher instruction but the ideas were novel)

Methodology

- Repetition ("go repeatedly over the same ground") (3)
- "lessons to be learned must not be too long nor beyond the capacity of the pupils" (3)
- Focus on those students who are most "inattentive"
- Explanation of the lesson is given before "the memory is taxed"
- "Nothing is to be committed to memory which has not been first well explained and illustrated" (22)
- Use of blackboard is important as well as the variance of instructional methods
- Lessons should be clear, concise, and as "amusing and as interesting as possible" (3)
- Papers must be corrected carefully and often (5)
- Regard students as children of God
- "lead by love rather than by fear" (80)
- Students master the lesson by understanding the meaning
- Teachers must prepare lesson plans

- Teachers must show respect for one another
- “The pupils must be watched over and spoken to with the greatest sweetness and charity”
- Exams should be rare
- Students should be instructed in the “art of reasoning”
- Lessons are animated and lively
- Education is lifelong. It is necessary to know how to learn
- Learning should be joyful

Recreation:

- 5 minute break between each class (2)

Punishments

- Students “forfeit a merit” (no demerits are given)
- Do not be “hasty in punishing” (85)

For struggling students:

- “Extra class lessons for those who are not able to follow the classes must be taken from the time devoted to foreign language” (2)

Moral instruction

- To be hung on the wall: “A woman without piety and virtue is a disgrace to her sex” (10)
- “Hilarity and joy are the best manifestations of a peaceful conscience”

Foreign Language classes

- Begun at youngest grade
- Foreign language must be spoken at “recreation” time

History

- “It is essential to give students a knowledge of historic facts as . . . it is the facts . . . learnt in these first lessons on history that pupils afterwards classify and generalized” (50)

Grammar

- “They should know what words mean before they spell them” (27)

Fine Arts

- Part of a serious education
- Aesthetics provide “the meeting point of the material with the spiritual, of the human with the divine”

Resources:

- DVD: A Love Full of Action (description of Cornelia’s life, educational philosophy, and her schools) <http://www.shej.co.uk/heritage/film.html>
- Book of Studies

Questions to Consider:

- How was educational reform based on other social movements of the time?
- How was Cornelia similar to the educational reformers of her time?
- How was she different?

Assignment: Writing Prompt

Cornelia Connelly has come to visit your school. Pretend you are Cornelia and write a letter to the school head telling whether you think the school exemplifies the ideals set out in the “Book of Studies