Herbst argues that education at the turn of the century is lacking revisionism. Education historians are content to “conform to the prescriptions of state-imposed requirements” (Herbst, 1999) Furthermore, little is being done to study the pedagogy being performed in individual classrooms. He argues that it seems like little is being done to search for alternatives to modern day education. He stated that education was exciting in the past as it was “a period of unparalleled fruitful scholarly activity.” (Herbst, 1999) However, he is worried now that “the academic world has turned into a world of words, a world of its own creation that reflects only on itself.” (Herbst, 1999) Herbst is concerned that we are no longer looking back at the history of education in order to reform it. It is also written that some progressive private schools have changed their pedagogical practices in order to put the students first. However, little research is being carried out to determine its effectiveness.

Herbst is explicitly trying to stir innovation in education. He wishes for more research to be done on progressive (innovative) education systems and to challenge the status quo of public school education. He wishes to make the school system better by changing it which is a major part of my innovation definition. He is also challenging the way that students currently learn. He believes that schools have “turned to the study of educational policy at the expense of investigations of classroom practice and pedagogy.” (Herbst, 1999) Furthermore, he is challenging the way that students are currently learning in the classroom. He wishes for more research to be done on the classroom practices. My definition of learning deals with the senses that learners are exposed to in everyday interactions. This means that learning may be more significant based on the pedagogical practices being implemented on a daily basis than the educational policies that have been developed.

Herbst is obviously quite frustrated with the lack of effort at reform in education. There has been a lot of talk about reform and innovation but very little is being done to change the way that education is being carried out. I want to know what kind of progressive schools should we be studying? Are we looking too far forward with modern day technologies when we should actually be looking backwards at what we have done in the past?

References

Historical Thinking – Teaching for Hope (Werner)

Werner writes about the importance of teaching students about hope. Werner states in his article that students are feeling more anxious in schools when it comes to various topics (especially current affairs). There are many emotions that help students become more engaged in a topic but unfortunately anxiety “is not a friend of learning: anxious students do not perform well.” (Werner, 2008) Teachers need to acknowledge these topics that are making students feel anxious and demonstrate that the world is doing something to improve the issue. As Werner states, “Hope expresses itself as a “yes” to tomorrow.” (Werner, 2008) This can be difficult for educators as many of the topics are sensitive to students. However, with modern technology students are getting access to this information at younger and younger ages so it is important that these sensitive topics are discussed in the proper environment. Werner also explains that this can relay into an opportunity to get students involved as activists to improve a particular situation. This gives the students hope that they are living in a world that has a bright future. Students regularly want to know that their learning is relevant. They also want to know that adults are looking for ways to improve the world that they will be living in for a long time.

The author addresses teaching and learning in this article. The author acknowledges that “shielding children from global problems cannot be a solution to preserving their sense of hope.” (Werner, 2008) Learners will eventually come to know about these problems and will want to know that there is something being done to fix them. This allows for creative ways of teaching global problems to learners. My definition of teaching relates to this article as it is important to determine the who / what / why of a global problem before teaching it. It is also important to determine the context before engaging students in the topic. Furthermore, it is important to role model what you are teaching to the students. Educators may be the first adult that they see interacting with a global issue that they are concerned with. Learning occurs as a result of the senses that students experience. This is why it’s important to discuss important global issues with the students and expose them to situations to may give them hope. It could be detrimental to their learning if they interact with a current issue in a toxic environment.

Teaching for hope is a fabulous concept. I have taught current issues in the past and looked for solutions from my students but I like the idea of presenting ways that issues are already being solved in the world. However, how do we engage a student in a sensitive topic that they do not want to learn about? I have even had parents who have asked for their children to be excused from sensitive topics.

References

Historical Thinking – Great Unsolved Mysteries of Canadian History (Ruth Sandwell)

This article brings to light the opportunity to use primary documents as a major part of classroom instruction. The article emphasises the importance of having students “do” history by using primary documents to come up with their own opinions and arguments. Sandwell states that teachers are using primary documents more often in their classes as they believe that it increases critical enquiry, or they believe that “this approach is simply more interesting to students, [either way,] teachers are using primary documents more often in their classrooms as they encourage students to “Do” history.” (Sandwell, 2005) History should be presented as a mystery and the students should use documents and other sources to solve it. This engages the students in the learning process and teaches them higher order processing than simply regurgitating something from a textbook. Sandwell acknowledges that too often school’s History class is taught “as a series of facts to be memorized and given back to the teacher in a slightly altered form.” (Sandwell, 2005) Sandwell’s article presents mysteries and lesson plans for teachers to utilize in their classroom.

I am a trained history teacher, and I am excited to try some of Sandwell’s lessons. I believe that this is a creative way of teaching students material. When I was taking History courses during university some of my favorite times we’re going to the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa and answering my thesis through primary documents that could be found there. Giving students a similar opportunity through this website is a great way to foster critical thinking in History.

Sandwell implements lesson plans with the use of primary documents creatively. It takes items that are already known (primary documents) and allows students to synthesize new information based on the documents being provided. This is very similar to my definition of creativity. This article also relates to my definition of teaching. Sandwell mentions in the article that it is important to assess students “at a level that is appropriate to students’ abilities and knowledge.” (Sandwell, 2005) Sandwell emphasizes that teaching students how to use primary documents properly cannot be done without understanding their level of ability. This is in line with ensuring that the students are within a zone of proximal development when learning about history, which is part of my definition of teaching.

I really enjoyed that this article was a practical resource that I can use in the future with my students. However, my question revolves around the practicality of using a resource like this while also teaching a curriculum. The grade 10 History curriculum is “Canadian History since World War I” (2013) so my question for the author would be how do you balance a project such as the Great Unsolved Mysteries of Canadian History with the curricular content that needs to be taught? Or, would you simply teach this as a skilled based project?

References


Charistou writes about the history of McArthur and some of the reform principles that were adopted during his time as Deputy Minister and then Minister of Education in Ontario between 1934 and 1942. During this time, reform in education was needed as the times required a new type of education that could prepare students for uncertain times. They had just experienced the great depression and education needed a way to prepare students for a changing world. Duncan McArthur’s reform of education focussed on personal development, socialization, and citizenship. This was much different than the previous curriculum that focused solely on subject matter. Duncan wanted to empower students by giving them choice and teaching them about social responsibility. One of my favorite quotes from the text was that McArthur “was doubtful that compulsion motivated students to learn.” (Charistou, 2013) I think that education has become something that is compulsory to many students. It is the students that don’t feel that way that are more motivated to perform exceptionally.

I feel like McArthur was ahead of his times with the reforms that he implemented. He was innovative in his program priorities. He wanted students’ learning experiences to be based on what they would experience outside of school. My definition of innovation, is the act of changing something to increase its usefulness. Duncan McArthur was innovative when it came to the reform of education in Ontario. He felt that students we’re not being prepared for the world outside of school and his reforms focussed on preparing them for that. Furthermore, McArthur intended to improve the learning of students. He wanted students to synthesize new knowledge based on their experiences in school. These new experiences would be different than the knowledge based curriculum that students had completed prior to McArthur becoming Deputy Minister.

McArthur’s ideas were innovative and ahead of their time. There still seems to be remnants of his ideas in the current Ontario curriculum. However, it feels like some of the items that he was pushing for are still being resisted today. I would ask the author, to what extent were McArthur’s reforms passed? We’re they accepted and implemented by school administrators and teachers? If so, to what degree?

References