

A COOPERATIVE LESSON PLAN FOR TEACHING OWENITE EDUCATION IN NEW HARMONY

By Jerry Noland

GRADE LEVEL: Secondary

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8600 University Boulevard
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(812) 465-7014

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Activity 1

Students should be in small groups of four to discuss the quotations from Robert Owen and William Maclure. The Twelve Fundamental Laws of Human Nature by Robert Owen are included for more advanced classes.

The question for discussion should be: What type of educational system would Robert Owen and William Maclure probably set up in New Harmony based upon their ideas?

Time: one-half period for reading and group discussion and one-half period for class discussion.

Activity 2

Give students the reading taken from my historical research paper--topic Educational Methods and Structure in New Harmony. Footnotes are included for teacher reference. Give everyone a chance to read the material. In groups of four have the students list at least ten features of Owenite Education in New Harmony. After they have listed the characteristics they should list the best and worst features of education in New Harmony. Students should be prepared to defend their choices.

Time: one period to work and one-half period for discussion

Activity 3

Give the students the survey on their views of education. Discuss the results of the survey. Note: the lefthand side of the survey reflects Owenite views of education.

Time: one-half period for survey and one-half to one period for the discussion of the survey.

Robert Owen, who purchased New Harmony from George Rapp's Harmony Society in 1825 wrote in The Book of the New Moral World (1844) that "It is now known that the character of each individual is formed for him, and chiefly by society. It is true, nature prepares the material before birth; but it is now known that even in this respect nature may be materially aided by lately acquired knowledge. It is also known that society, and not the individual, has the full power to make, or manufacture, the human material from birth into a very inferior or superior man or woman at maturity. Inferior, by entire neglect, or by filling the mind from infancy with any of the superstitions of the world; or superior, by laying a solid foundation of truth, and building up the mind with the most useful knowledge of facts, all in accordance with that foundation."

William Maclure, partner of Robert Owen at New Harmony, wrote to his friend Benjamin Silliman in 1822 that "In reflecting upon the absurdity of my own classical education, launched into the world as ignorant as a pig of anything useful, not having occasion to practice anything I had learned,... I had been long in the habit of considering education one of the greatest abuses our species were guilty of, and of course one of the reforms the most beneficial to humanity, and likewise offering to ambition a fair field. Almost no improvement has been made in it for two or three hundred years; there was immense room for change to put it on a par with other functions of civilization."



THE TWELVE FUNDAMENTAL LAWS OF HUMAN NATURE

on which Robert Owen predicates a change
of society that will form an entire new state of existence,
as read in the debate between him and Mr. Campbell,
at Cincinnati, Ohio, on the 13th April, 1829.

1. That man at his birth is ignorant of everything relative to his own organization, and that he has not been permitted to create the slightest part of any of his natural propensities, faculties, or qualities, physical or mental.

2. That no two infants at birth have yet been known to possess precisely the same organization; while the physical, mental and moral differences, between all infants, are formed without their knowledge or will.

3. That each individual is placed at birth, without his knowledge or consent, within circumstances, which, acting upon his peculiar organization, impress the general character of those circumstances upon the infant, child and man. Yet, that the influence of those circumstances, is to a certain degree modified by the peculiar natural organization of each individual.

4. That no infant has the power of deciding at what period of time, or in what part of the world he shall come into existence; of whom he shall be born, in what particular religion he shall be trained to believe, or by what other circumstance he shall be surrounded from birth to death.

5. That each individual is so created, that, when young, he may be made to receive impressions to produce either true ideas or false notions, and beneficial or injurious habits, and to retain them with great tenacity.

6. That each individual is so created that, he must believe according to the strongest impressions that can be made on his feelings, and other faculties, while his belief in no case depends upon his will.

7. That each individual is so created that he must like that which is pleasant to him, or that which produces agreeable sensations on his individual organization, and he must dislike that which creates in him unpleasant or disagreeable sensations; while he cannot discover, previous to experience, what those sensations shall be.

8. That each individual is so created that the sensations made upon his organization, although pleasant and delightful at their commencement and for some duration, generally become, when continued beyond a certain period, without change, disagreeable and painful. While on the

contrary, when a too rapid change of sensations is made on his organization, it dissipates, weakens and otherwise injures his physical, intellectual and moral powers and enjoyments.

9. That the highest health, the greatest progressive improvements, and the permanent happiness of each individual, depend in a great degree upon the proper cultivation of all his physical, intellectual and moral faculties and powers from infancy to maturity, and upon all these parts of his nature being duly called into action, at their proper period, and temperately exercised according to the strength and capacity of the individual.

10. That the individual is made to possess and acquire the worst character, when his organization at birth has been compounded of the most inferior propensities, faculties and qualities of our common nature; and when so organized, he has been placed, from birth to death, amidst the most vicious or worst circumstances.

11. That the individual is made to possess and to acquire a medium character, when his original organization has been created superior, and when the circumstances which surround him from birth to death produce continued vicious or unfavorable impressions. Or when his organization has been formed of inferior material, and the circumstances in which he has been placed from birth to death, are of a character to produce superior impressions only. Or when there has been some mixture of good and bad qualities in the original organization, and when it has also been placed, through life in varied circumstances of good and evil. This last compound has been hitherto the common lot of mankind.

12. That the individual is made the most superior of his species, when his original organization has been compounded of the best proportions, of the best ingredients of which human nature is formed, and when the circumstances which surround him from birth to death are of a character to produce only superior impressions; or in other words, when the circumstances, or laws, institutions and customs in which he is placed, are all in unison with his nature.

Thus a traditional classical education was not meeting the needs of an industrial society.¹⁴

Robert Owen wrote much about education. In a lecture given in Manchester England, he outlined his ideas on an educational system from birth to 30. Owen suggested the following:

1. Community education at birth.
2. No punishment or rewards as individuals.
3. Active involvement from an early age in practical work.
4. Hands on education and apprenticeship with skilled individuals.
5. Older children to help teach younger children.
6. At twelve years of age a much more broadened practical work.
7. Continued education through work at the age of 30.¹⁵

To Robert Owen education was a lifetime pursuit. The community was responsible for schools, libraries, lecture halls, museums, and ballrooms. Thus, education would create a "New Moral World." The world would be governed through education, and all other governments will become unnecessary.¹⁶

Robert Owen's and William Maclure's educational experiment was really designed as a non-violent revolution against the capitalist class on behalf of the industrial and agricultural workers.¹⁷ Thus educational reform was to build a socialist society. This was so because Robert Owen believed that private property, religion, and the family

structure were hinderances to achieving a just society.¹⁸

Educational Methods and Structure in New Harmony

When Robert Owen came to New Harmony in January 1826 he believed he was on the eve of a transformation compared to which "all former revolutions in human affairs scarcely deserved a name." He announced that a "match has been applied to a train that, if I mistake not, will dispel past errors, until old things shall pass away, and all shall become new, beautiful and delightful." Owen's first speech on January 12, 1826 at New Harmony was on education. He proudly reported that the rest of his party was on a keelboat coming toward New Harmony and that they represented

"more learning than ever before was contained in a boat." And by learning he meant not "Latin and Greek & and languages but real substantial knowledge." Among the new arrivals, he announced, would be "some of the ablest instructors of youth that could be found in the U. S. and perhaps in the world." His hearers read into this an ever grander promise: "In Harmony there will be the best Library & the best School in the United States."¹⁹

Owen saw himself coming to this country to change it from a selfish system to an enlightened social system which would remove all contests among individuals. Owen believed he was bringing the millennium to Indiana.²⁰ What was the nature of this educational millenneum?

Infant School

The infant school was the first of its kind in the United States. It was for children two through five, and was

to be taught principally by Marie Fretageot and Mrs. Joseph Neef. Its enrollment was approximately 100. It was a boarding school designed to lift infants from the isolation, the ignorance, and prejudice of family units. It tried to emphasize an affection atmosphere with communal sharing.²¹ Owen believed that very young children needed a special environment to expose them to games, stories, and other activities.²²

Higher School

In the Higher School, children from ages five through twelve received instruction in mathematics, languages, writing, music and gymnastics from the Mr. Joseph Neef family and associates. The emphasis was learning by doing as they were taught lessons by maps, machines, and skeletons. William Maclure started the School of Industry which trained the Higher School students manual arts. The intent was to teach children occupations skills. The products produced through the learning process could be sold to the community. In the School of Industry boys studied engraving, printing, taxidermy, carpentry, wheelwrighting, wood training, blacksmithing, cabinet making, hat making, shoe making, and agriculture. The girls studied washing, sewing, cooking, housekeeping, and dressmaking.²³ Most of the eighty students in the School of Industry were boys who were under the supervision of William Piquepal and Cornelius Tiebout. An interesting aspect of the School of Industry was

that William Maclure believed that research and teaching should go together he urged a program where students would learn from scholars as well as print the works of New Harmony scientists. The School of Industry students produced over 1,300 copper plantees and printed several scientific books.²⁴

Adult education

Adult education was emphasized as Robert Owen and others believed that educational was a lifetime pursuit. Scientists of the community lectured at free sessions. For example, Gerald Troost spoke on chemistry, mineralogy, and mathematics; Thomas Say on natural history, and William Phiquepal on experimental farming. There were about 80 persons enrolled in these classes.²⁵

William Maclure endowed the Workingmen's Institute in 1838 while the School of Industry was still functioning. Of course, this was the link to the educational system born in the 1820's to Owen and Maclure. The Workingmen's Institute fostered education of adults especially those working in industry. ²⁶

Educational Methods in New Harmony

There was much consensus regarding the educational program at New Harmony in spite of the controversy over the general direction of the society. Overall, the emphasis on textbook instruction and individual recitation was rejected.

Punishment was rejected, and a friendly atmosphere was encouraged between teachers and students. Concepts were taught by advancing from the simple to complex level.²⁷ Teaching by concrete experiences rather than by memorization became the rule. Learning proceeded from objects: maps, skeletons observations of nature, physical exercise, dancing, and marching.²⁸ Science was supplemented by fields trips. Physical labor was encouraged in the educational process. William Maclure placed a high priority on vocational learning by training students for a variety of crafts and trades. Throughout the schooling there was an indoctrination concerning the virtues of community living.²⁹

Education in the utopia was viewed as a lifelong process, and was coeducational. Information adult education included lectures, discussions, and musical programs.³⁰ A major aspect of the New Harmony enterprise was its activity in scientific research and publishing. William Maclure's thinking was advanced for the day in his conception that educational institutional should combine teaching, research, and publication.³¹ The School of Industry, established by Maclure, was a secondary school, but in its combination of teaching and research it resembled a university.³²

It would be interesting to speculate what life was actually like for students in such a utopian setting. We are fortunate to have a written primary account of what schooling was actually like in New Harmony written by Miner K. Kellogg in 1886. Mr. Kellogg came to New Harmony as a child of ten

or eleven.. Of course, he would have had to be over seventy years old at the time he recorded the account. The quotation used from Mr. Kellogg is rather extensive for this paper. It is given because it provides a rare insight into the structure and methods of education in Owenite New Harmony that have been presented in this paper.

As soon as enough children had arrived to form into classes, schools were established for their reception and care. There was one large boarding school which was conducted on the Military Mess system with two long tables paralld in one room. Into this the scholars were marched with military precision to their allotted places, and thus marched out together to the playgrounds where they were dismissed. Indeed the whole exercises were carried out in a prescribed and regular military manner.

Into this school I was placed. The food was of the simplest and cheapest kind--no meats, no eggs, no pies--Nothing in fact but corn mush and milk. This was good and healthy to those that liked it--but I did not--it so disagreed with me that I could not touch the mush. The milk only was sipped up, hence I was nearly starved. Whenever I could do so after dismissal I would slip into the kitchen door and beg for something to eat--and I was often gratified (sic) by the kind old cook giving me a good sized piece of the handbaked mush which adhered to the large iron pot. There seems to be a determined effort to starve me out of my fastidiousness and to keep up the principle of equality among the scholars--all must be treated alike. In the playground --quite a field behind the school, were erected swings bars, poles and others things pertaining to a Gymnasium, and gave great delight and healthy exercise to us all: all here also were regularly drilled in squads and companies in all military movements by experienced men. Our recitations were conducted in so agreeable a manner that all were interested and studied faithfully--there was no need of severity in any case. In fact the established order of government was one of kindness--persuasion and love: an order more acceptable to scholars, than agreeable to teachers--for the latter was compelled to keep a check on their impatience, and to govern their own tempers when sorely tried. I recall one laughable instance of this. One of our best instructors was an Irishman of fine abilities named Gilmore. He was marching us down broad street for exercise and drill formed into one long line across the street. We could keep a line well dressed

but for one gawky lazy overgrown boy named Ran Boss, who would persistently fall a step behind. Gilmore would frequently touch time up from behind with a long fishing pole of cane--still he lagged behind--at last Gilmore lost all patience and temper after exhausting kind words--then he brought his long pole suddenly to his aid by swishing sweep across the back of Ran would found his proper place very quickly. But the whole line broke as if by one impulse--the boys scattering in all directions with the cry of "Old School"--"Old School"--with Gilmore in great passion following those he could reach with his pole--uttering his malediction as he ran. "I'll give you old school, I'll give you old school," but he never got us together again that day--any we were never called upon to make any apologies for such rudeness to our teacher--it was so well understood that he had himself violated the Golden Rule of the school. This was the only violation of New Harmony discipline that my memory now recalls.³³

It was interesting to note that while the methods of instruction were agreeable to Mr. Kellogg that is possible that the increased student freedom put pressures on teachers to keep their cool when the utopian vision of education became unsettled. The comments of "Old School" and "New School" were very interesting. It would seem that Owen's and McLure's methods preceded the progressive movement of the twentieth century.³⁴

Owenite Legacy to Education in America

New Harmony was the seedbed for a number of educational reforms even though its communal society has been assigned to the half forgotten chapters of history textbooks.³⁵ The following statements concern the legacy of the Owen experiment to education in America.

Footnotes

1. Evansville Sunday Courier Press, December 16, 1984.
2. Donald E. Pitzer, "Education in Utopia: The New Harmony Experience," Indiana Historical Society Lectures, 1976-1977 (1978): 75-76.
3. Donald E. Pitzer, Patterns of Education in American Communal Societies. Communal Life An International Perspective, edited by Yosef Gorni, Yaacov Oved, Idit Paz, pp. 286-87.
4. Donald E. Pitzer, The Owenite Tradition in America, (Robert Owen Association of Japan--Tokyo, 1984), p. 11.
5. Lyman Tower Sargent, Owenite Utopias as Models For Communal Societies, (National Historic Communal Society Association--Caterbery, N. H., 1986), p. 9.
6. James H. Madison, The Indiana Way, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press and Indiana Historical Society), p. 117.
7. G. L. Gutch, "New Harmony: An Example of Communitarian Education," Educational Theory Volume 22, (Winter 1972): 41.
8. Charles Burgess, A House Divided: Robert Owen and William Maclure, History of Education Society Meeting--Chicago, 1973) p. 100.
9. Pitzer, Patterns of Education in Communal Societies, p. 276.
10. Gutch, p. 40
11. Pitzer, Owenite Tradition in New Harmony, p. 12-13.
12. Donald F. Carmony and Josephine M. Elliot, "New Harmony Indiana: Robert Owen's Seedbed for Utopia." Indiana Magazine of History Volume LXXVI September 1980: 183.
13. Pitzer, "Education in Utopia: The New Harmony Experience," p. 14.
14. Gutch, p. 40.
15. Sargent, p. 7-8.
16. Burgess, p. 108.
17. Gutch, p. 40.

18. Madison, p. 177.
19. Arthur Bester, Backwoods Utopia (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 133.
20. William E. Wilson, Indiana History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966) p. 70.
21. Pitzer, The Owenite Tradition in America. p. 13.
22. Gutch, p. 44.
23. Pitzer, The Owenite Tradition in America, p. 14.
24. Pitzer, "Education in Utopia: The New Harmony Experience," p. 93.
25. Ibid, p. 93.
26. Ibid, p. 99.
27. Carmony and Elliot, p. 183.
28. Pitzer, Patterns of Education in American Communal Societies, p. 281.
29. Carmony and Elliot, p 184.
30. Ibid, p. 184.
31. Arthur Bester, Education and Reform at New Harmony (Indianapolis, 1948), p. 295.
32. Ibid, p. 296.
33. Miner K. Kellogg, New Harmony: A Youngster's View. Volume I The Hoosier State Readings in History, edited by Ralph Gray, p. 197.
34. Gutch, p. 46.
35. George B. Lockwood, The New Harmony Movement, (D. Appleton and Company, 1905) p. 3-4.
36. Ibid, p. 3-4.
37. Ibid, p. 3-4.
38. Ibid, p. 3-4.
39. Ibid, p. 3-4.

Your Ideas about Education

Directions: Place an X along the line that indicates how you learn.

alone-----groups

use of textbook
alone-----variety of
methods

classical
education-----practical
education

lecture-----problem
solving

little education
after graduation-----education
lifetime pursuit

Answer the following:

1. How do you learn?
2. How are you now taught?
3. How should we be educating our youth today?