

University of North Carolina Greensboro

Title: Diverse Contributions to the Education System

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For my honors project, I wish to touch upon a topic that I have begun to learn about within the education field. Contributions within our field are very broad and diverse. In schools, there are only certain names heard and discussed when educating students. As long as I can remember, most of these famous names belong to white people that have been deemed “very important” people that contributed to our progression and lives as we know them today. However, contributions within the education system do not stop and only come from white men as we have been taught. Many people, who come from different ethnicities and backgrounds, have made groundbreaking discoveries that also contribute to our society and lives. I wish to dig deeper into the education system and the contributions that helped us all get to where we are today. I wish to recognize and give credit to some unspoken names that have been overlooked in the field so that I may continue to give them credit in my future as an educator.

Beginning with a few names that are spoken of when educating the future educators of our field include Horace Mann, Jean Piaget, and Howard Gardner to name a few. Horace Mann advanced change within the American educational system and can be accredited for teacher training colleges, free libraries, and free public education to all children through taxation (Tom, 2020). Jean Piaget’s research can be accredited for the foundation of how we understand the cognitive development of a child (Tom, 2020). Finally, Howard Garner is accredited for ‘The Multiple Intelligences Theory’; this research redefined how society views a student’s ability to learn and how it should be assessed in its process (Tom, 2020). Of course, these are just a few examples of important contributions to the education system and how it was formulated into the most recent advancements we know today. These are just a few names that most educators remember and can think of off top of their head. These men have made groundbreaking history and discoveries. However, would these same men have been able to make the progress they

made in the history of our field and been remembered for their research had they been a person of color, or even been a woman for instance?

Although their research and findings are not spoken of as much in conventional teaching, many people of color have contributed to the progression of the education system as well as white educators and philosophers. “Prior to 1954, life for African American educators in the American South was particularly difficult. It was almost impossible for African Americans to become physical educators because they were denied access to large universities in the South attended by Caucasian students. One alternative was to enroll in smaller “Black colleges,” now called historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). These institutions prepared, and continue to prepare, physical educators, and they offer degree programs in a variety of other disciplines” (Cazers & Curtner-Smith, 2013). Although this unethical reality for African American educators created a looming dark cloud around their path to education, there were, fortunately, a few black pioneers that braved and succeeded through systemic racism. Dr. Archie Wade became The University of Alabama’s first black faculty member in the department of kinesiology for 30 years; Wade endured stereotypical threats connected to his race throughout his time as an educator up until his retirement (Cazers & Curtner-Smith, 2013). “Wade’s ability to deal with and persevere in the face of this marginalization and stereotype threat was mediated by his strong sense of self-efficacy. This was built on a foundation of successful sporting, educational, and pedagogical experiences” (Cazers & Curtner-Smith, 2013). In 1933, Inez Beverly Prosser became the first black woman to receive her Ph.D. in Education Psychology (*8 black pioneers who've influenced education*). Brown’s research and arguments made regarding the effects of racial inequity on the mental health of black children within her dissertation were used in the debate leading up to the famous ‘Brown v. Board of Education’ supreme court ruling

in 1954 (Horizons National, 2020). Stuart Hall is known as the “Godfather of multiculturalism” and promoted research into low and high brow culture that interpreted identity, race, and sexuality as part of society and politics (*8 black pioneers who've influenced education*). “Multicultural education tries to create equal educational opportunities for all students by changing the total school environment so that it will reflect the diverse cultures and groups within a society and the nation's classrooms” (*Multicultural education: Goals and dimensions*). Administrators and educators are currently striving to implement multicultural education within the classroom to promote a safe and equal school environment.

In history, there have been many times when gender has dictated and determined societal norms, and of course, the education system is no different. “For example, Rousseau said that women ought not to learn a great many things, but only such as it is proper for them to know. He was well known for his educational theories and pedagogy, but did his theories include females? His response was, "Thus the education of the fair sex should be directly relative to ours. To oblige us, to do us service, to gain our love and esteem, to rear us when young, to attend us when grown up, to advise, to console us, to soothe our pains, and to soften life with every kind of banishment; these are the duties of the sex at all times, and what they ought to learn from their infancy (Kersey, 1981, p. 132)” (Butterfield, 2000). This notion and ideology have since faltered in our society but have not been completely demolished in other aspects. However, women have managed to push past these societal stigmas and created history over time. For instance, Phillis Wheatley was the first African American poet to be published (*8 black pioneers who influenced education*). Despite being a woman and despite being a slave in the 18th century, Wheatley provided proof that women and slaves were intelligent and talented at many things, including poetry (*8 black pioneers who influenced education*). In November of 1837, Mary Lyon

established the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, located in Massachusetts (Butterfield, 2000). Mount Holyoke was established to influence the stimulation of higher education for American women for the first time and ultimately made it possible to raise education opportunities for women (Butterfield, 2000). Margaret Haley was the leader of the Chicago Teachers Federation, which advocated for the respect of teachers and fair compensation in the workplace; Haley became a loud voice for national education politics regardless of the male-dominated presence in the field at the time (Smith, 2022).

In brief, there are many diverse contributions to the education field that do not get enough credit for their findings and research. Above I named a few African American and women educational pioneers that deserve to be discussed and taught to future educators. Through conversation and research, we can give credit to more than just a few remembered pioneers that are taught currently. In the classroom, we try to create an accepting, equal and safe environment the best way we know how. By teaching more than just the history of the white men in our field, I believe we can begin to build an accepting, equal and safe environment before educators step foot in a classroom.