American Education: An Overview

John Brender, Ph.D.
American Education: Beginnings

• First public schools in 1825

American education focused on strong practical and vocational skills

The three “r’s”

1. readin’ 2. (w)ritin’ 3. ‘rithmetic
Important Goals

• Learning the democratic process
• The importance of voting
• Patriotism
• Respect for people and property
• Religion and prayer*

• (not group oriented behavior)
Early Colleges

- Harvard (1636) William & Mary (1693) Yale (1701)
- Emphasis on thinking rather than practical knowledge
- Religious training for ministers
Schemas

• K-8 / 9-12
• Grammar School/High School
• K-6 / 7-8 / 9-12
• K-6 / 7-9 / 9-12
• Elementary / Jr. High / High School
• K-5 / 6-8 / 9-12
• Elementary / Middle School / High School
Educational Philosophies

China
and
The United States
China: Curricular Control

Ministry of Education

University Entrance Exams

Teachers
U.S.A.: Curricular Control

(State Board of Education)

(Local School Boards)

(School Administration)

Teachers
China: College Admissions

1. Test scores
U.S. College Admissions

- Grades & Grade Point Average (GPA)
- Difficulty of classes (AP courses)
- ACT & SAT
- Letters of recommendation
- Extra curricular activities
- Essays
- Awards or Achievements
- Initiative or “Spark”
- Race / ethnicity / geographic region *
Chinese Goals

• Factual knowledge
• Memorization
• Diligence
• Obedience / Respect
• Test Taking
American Goals

• Critical thinking
• Original thinking
• Expression of ideas
• Supporting of ideas
• Interpersonal skills
Chinese Teaching Perspective

Transmittal: Teachers transmit knowledge to students. “The sage on the stage”
American Teaching Perspectives

1. Transmittal
2. Apprenticeship (hands on learning)
3. Developmental (discussion)
4. Nurturing
5. Social Reform
Features of American Colleges

- Education for the masses
- Adult / lifelong education /second chances
- Liberal arts emphasis for undergraduates
- Changing majors common & acceptable
- Papers as common as exams
- Participation grades
- Extra curricular activities
Features of American Colleges continued

• Admission based on qualitative data
• Departments usually democratic
• Culturally distinctive institutions
• Remedial courses sometimes offered
• Multicultural emphasis
Increasing problems K-12

- 15% physically or mentally handicapped
- 25% below poverty level
- 14% children born to teenaged mothers
- 14% children of unmarried parents
- 10% poorly educated/illiterate parents
- 40% in broken homes before 18
- 25% drop out rate (higher in urban and rural areas)
Additional Problems

• Large non-English speaking population
• Student rights may be too strong
• Litigious parents
• Under-prepared teachers
• National state standards impossible
• Gangs, drugs, violence
• Teenage pregnancies
Questions / Comments