

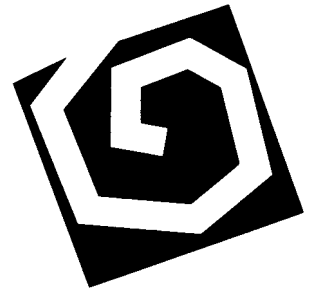
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Model, Model, Who Made the Model?

Assumptions of Traditional Learning

What goes on every day in tens of thousands of classroom settings has its foundations in long-held assumptions about learning. Let's look at three examples from which our current assumptions and models have developed. We start in the mid-1800s, move to the time of the "Scientific Revolution," and end with a model that emerged on the scene about fifty years ago and now operates powerfully in our daily lives.

Assumption Maker 1: The Factory Model

We might cringe if people suggest that schools are in any way like factories, yet our present educational model derives from the factory system of the early and mid 1800s. The challenge of that time was to design learning settings to facilitate integration and job preparation for hundreds of thousands of immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds. The assumptions behind this system were clear, and their expression can still be found in many contemporary classrooms, especially at the secondary and postsecondary levels worldwide:

1. We can identify the skill base that will be required of our students upon leaving school and into a projected future.
2. To best accomplish our task, we will need an information-purveyor, a moderate place to meet and some aids such as books and boards, all of which should serve to purvey information and skills to learners who memorise the information and learn skills for future application.



Much education today is monumentally ineffective. All too often we are giving young people cut flowers when we should be teaching them to grow their own plants.

John W. Gardner

3. For cost-efficient operation, the supervisor-to-worker and teacher-to-student ratio will be about 1:25, which is of little critical importance to the learning process.
4. We all learn in similar ways, so one teaching style will serve all learners.
5. Most will succeed in the system, but we do expect that some will fail. Essentially, that is their problem. It is a tolerable situation, however, as even the school failures can be accommodated in the labour force or supported by the state.

A Different Drummer

What has changed or is changing in our assumption base?

1. We can no longer accurately identify the job skills that will be necessary five or more years in the future. Thus, the purveyor-of-content model of the school is changing to a facilitator-of-process model. Rather than focusing on uptake and recitation of limited-life *information* from many unrelated courses, each presented in sequence and following patterns of reason and logic, students now need to learn *strategies and skills* for addressing real-life issues and problems that appear daily, out of sequence, and often in defiance of reason and logic.
2. The role of the classroom professional is changing from teacher, or “sage on the stage,” to facilitator, or “guide on the side.” The student’s resource base is expanding from books and chalk talks to a wider universe of the larger community and, thanks to in-class computers, to a readily accessible worldwide data base.
3. The teacher-to-student ratio, critical in the post-factory-model schooling system, remains critical to learning but, arguably, may become less so as students are encouraged to utilise a community-wide learning base and take responsibility for self-initiated learning.
4. Research is telling us that we each have a personal learning style that is not necessarily the same as the learning style of others (Dunn and Dunn 1992).
5. Finally, we are recognising that each of us began our schooling careers having *already proven ourselves* to be highly successful learners. The concept of failure as a learner, unless introduced in the home or early in the competitive sports environment, is a *school-initiated* concept based on one of the old factory-model assumptions. We cannot afford, in this day and age, to continue to inflict this life-disabling stigma. Children who arrive at the schoolroom door are, with few exceptions, ready, able and excited to learn. If they do not learn well in the environments we create, we need to create environments that address and