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### A Study of the Etymology of Words Related to Education

The intent of this paper is to study and evaluate Modern English words related to the topic of education, considering their etymology. Twenty words were chosen, all relating to the topic of education. These words include the word *education* itself, words related to the processes of education, the people involved in education, the passing and receiving of information, the collections of information, and the location where education typically occurs. In studying each of the words, this paper will evaluate the background and roots of the word, the originating language, approximate time when the word began to be used in English, and any interesting points regarding the definitions or shift in definitions for each of the words. The hypothesis the paper is based on is that approximately thirty percent of the words analyzed will be of Germanic origin, the majority of the words will be based on Latin or a romance language, and the bulk of the words will have originated in Middle English.

#### **Education, n.**

To begin studying words related to education, naturally the word *education* would be the first word to discuss. There are several definitions of this word as a noun in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), and the definitions that are not marked obsolete include various different forms of referring to the raising up or instructing of a child and teaching them manners, and even refer to training animals. In addition, some of these definitions even specify that education can include instructing adults, as well, not just children or animals. The word *education* is a fairly

modern word, having originated in the 1500s, in the Early Modern English period. The word is considered to have both French and Latin origins, based on the etymons of the French word *education* and the Latin word *education-*, *education*. These etymons are all connected to the concept of raising or bringing up and developing children. However, the word *education* can also be connected to the verb, *educate*, so it will be important to also review the etymology of this word as well. (“education, n.”)

### **Educate, v.**

The word *educate* on the OED is a verb that could commonly be defined as “to inform or instruct on a particular matter” (“educate, v.”). This definition began in the 1700s, but the word *educate* originally began to be used in the 1400s regarding raising children with proper behavior. In the 1500s, the word became associated with a more familiar concept, specifically regarding teaching children and adults in subjects, and the word could even be used to reference higher education. From this information, it is evident that while the verb *educate* originally began to be used about a century before the noun *education* (1500s), the definition that correlates with the word *education* and the concept of teaching in a sense more commonly thought of today also began around the same time, in the 1500s. In addition, though the noun *education* was based on both French and Latin, the verb *educate* is only based on the Latin etymons *educat-*, *educare*.

(“educate, v.”, “education, n.”)

### **Training, n.**

A word that is very similar in concept to *education* is the word *training*. The word *training* is a noun, meaning “discipline and instruction (given or received) for development of character, behaviour, or ability; education, rearing, bringing up” (“training, n.”). This word was derived from the English verb *train* and developed its definition over time. The definition above

began to be used in the early 1400s; however, like the word *educate*, the current use and definition above for the word *training* did not begin with the development of the word in the 1400s. Instead, this definition and use of the word began to be used in the 1500s. (“training, n.”)

### **Train, v.**

Naturally, since the noun *training* was derived from the English verb *train*, it would be important to evaluate this word as well. As with the words *educate* and *training*, the verb *train* began to be used in English in the 1400s, borrowed from the French word *trainer*, but the definition of *train* that is associated with education, and thus, the definition discussed above for word *training* did not begin to be used until the 1500s. This definition in the OED is “to subject to discipline and instruction for development of character, behaviour, or skill.” (“train, v.”)

### **Teach, v.**

Another verb similar to the word *train* and related to the act of educating someone is the word *teach*. While the word now refers to educating or providing instruction to others, the word, had an interesting background and some related definitions that are now obsolete. The word was inherited from Germanic into Old English, but some of its Germanic roots brought along the definition of showing someone something. Interestingly as a result, some of the definitions listed in the OED as obsolete describe the word as meaning to show someone something. However, a definition that is more commonly considered for the word *teach* is “to impart knowledge to, give instruction to; to inform, instruct, educate, train, school” (“teach, v.”). Interestingly, it would not be too far-fetched to make the connections between the current definition of imparting knowledge to someone and obsolete definitions of showing someone something. (“teach, v.”)

### **Instruct, v.**

Some of the current uses of the word *instruct* parallel the use of the word *teach*. In fact, the OED lists a couple of definitions that simply use the word *teach* as the definition or part of it. The word was borrowed into English in the 1400s from the Latin etymons of *instruct-* and *instruere*. Interestingly, these Latin words actually originally referred to building something, not teaching. Notice the similarity in the Latin words to the Early Modern English word *construct*, which also means refers to building something. Interestingly, despite the Latin words having referred to building things, the OED only indicates two definitions from Early Modern English, though listed as obsolete and chiefly poetic, that seem to even refer to building things. The OED does, however, reference connections to words in several other languages (i.e., Old French, Middle French, French, Anglo-Norman, Old Occitan, Catalan, Spanish, etc.) that lend toward the currently understood definition of teaching. (“instruct, v.”)

### **Tutor, v. & n.**

The word *tutor* can be used as a verb, referring to the act of teaching someone; however, the word was converted to a verb from the English noun *tutor*, which refers to a person who has more education or knowledge and is providing instruction or assistance to another. When the noun was borrowed from the French etymon *tutour* in the 1300s, the word could be used to describe a person who was the guardian of another person (i.e., child) while also being used to describe a person who would teach an individual privately. This definition does make sense in the fact that the French word *tutour* was derived from the Latin *tutor*, a “watcher, protector.” (“tutor, n.”)

### **Professor, n.**

While tutors are individuals who instruct young people in a private environment, another noun related to a person who teaches is *professor*. However, the word is usually restricted to

referring specifically to individuals who teach in higher education. In fact, the OED even defines the word *professor* as “a university academic of the highest rank” or “any teacher at a university” (“professor, n.”). This word also originated in English in the 1400s after borrowing from both French and Latin. The French etymons are *proffessur* and *professeur* while the Latin etymon is *professor*. Each of these etymons from French and Latin can be tied to the correlating definitions regarding a person who teaches academically. (“professor, n.”)

### **Pupil, n.**

Continuing the theme of individuals in the education system but shifting from those providing the information to those learning it, the word *pupil* is about the learners. This word does also have definitions as a noun that are unrelated to education, but this paper will focus specifically on the origins and definitions of the noun as it relates to education.

Interestingly, the original definition (c1384) listed in the OED, which is now obsolete, relating to this version of the word *pupil* actually refers to a child who is an orphan or ward. The word *pupil* did not become a reference to students or children who are under the instruction of a teacher until the 1500s. The word was developed by borrowing from the French etymon *pupille* and the Latin etymon *pupillus*. Both etymons also referred to children, minors, and orphans, and neither etymon originally referred to students in the sense the word is known today. (“pupil, n.<sup>1</sup>”)

### **Literacy, n.**

In another shift in focus or topic of words, it is important to study and understand words relating to the understanding of information taught. The word *literacy* is a noun that refers to the ability to read and write. Often, the word is used in discussions of a group(s) of people and whether or not the group can read or write. This word began to be used in English in the 1800s but was derived from the older English word *literate*. (“literacy, n.”)

**Literate, adj. & n.**

As the word *literacy* relates back to the word *literate*, this is the next logical word to examine. This word can be used as an adjective, describing a person or group of people, but it is often used as a noun, referring to a person who is able to read and write or a person who is educated. Its use in English began in the 1400s, but it was borrowed from the Latin *litteratus*, which referred to individuals who were educated, understood letters, and could even refer to teachers. As such, the modern definition did not stray much from the definition of the word borrowed for it. (“literate, adj. & n.”)

**Knowledge, n.**

Another word related to the idea of understanding information or having learned something is the noun *knowledge*. A well-known and generally understood word, a definition in the OED of the word *knowledge* is “the fact or condition of knowing something” (“knowledge, n.”). While this word is an Old English word, it was derived from the English verb *know*. (“knowledge, n.”)

**Know, v.**

As a result of the derivation of the word *knowledge* from the word *know*, the next word to review will be the word *know*. This word, meaning “to be acquainted with, have experience of” in the OED, is familiar to most English speakers, as it is a very commonly used word in Modern English (“know, v.”). This word is a verb and is also from Old English, but it was inherited from the original Germanic and can be seen as a cognate to the Old High German words *-knaen*, *inknaen*, and *irknaen*. These words have very similar meanings to that of the current word, *know*. (“know, v.”)

**Learn, v.**

After discussing the word *knowledge*, the natural progression would be to discuss how to acquire that knowledge. This line of logic would naturally lead to the word *learn*. This word is a verb and refers to the act of gaining knowledge. In the English language, the word *learn* has been used since the beginning (Old English). The original form of the word in Old English was *leornian*. This word was closely connected with Northumbrian, Old Frisian, Old Saxon, and Old High German as well, but it was ultimately inherited from the Germanic (through West Germanic) root word *\*lairâ* (lore). This is interesting because the word *lore* had not been even considered for the list of words to review in this paper, but it is another Old English word that also refers to teaching and information that is learned (“lore, n.<sup>1</sup>”). This information helps to make a little bit more sense out of words like *folklore*. (“learn, v.”)

### **Study, v.**

In discussing the word *learn*, the logical next step would be to consider how one may learn, which leads to the verb *study*. While the verb *study* is typically used in Modern American English to refer to putting attention and effort into learning information, it is interesting to note that the word originally had a bit broader of a meaning. Some of the definitions listed in the OED involve putting effort into and striving toward something. In fact, the word *study*, while it began being used in Old English, was borrowed from both French (*studier, studier*) and Latin (*studere*), and these words that it was based on also refer to this idea of putting the attention and effort into something. While some of the French did refer to wanting to learn something, the words did not necessarily just relate to knowledge or learning. This also makes some older-based texts make more sense in their context. For example, the King James Bible says to “study to show thyself approved,” which is difficult to comprehend (*KJV Bible*, I

Tim. 2:15). However, with this new understanding of the word *study*, it makes more sense.

(“study, v.”)

### **Lesson, n.**

When an individual studies or otherwise tries to learn information, it is often associated with a set of information that would have been provided to the individual by the instructor, professor, or tutor. Often that information would be presented or provided to the student in a lesson, which reveals the importance of studying the word *lesson*. As hinted at above, the noun *lesson* can refer to a collection of information provided by the teacher for the student to learn. There are times, however, when the word is used to refer more specifically to the period of time in which the information is being provided to the students. Most of the definitions for the word *lesson* in the OED refer to one of these two ideas. The word *lesson* was borrowed from the French etymon *leçon* in the 1200s. This original French word also referred to the instruction being taught, but in addition, it also had some more specific definitions related to reading and reciting of information. (“lesson, n.”)

### **Class, n. & adj.**

When considering the word *lesson*, the word *class* comes to mind as a synonym. However, in reviewing the information about the word, some interesting things come to light. While the definition initially expected for this project would have been relating to the time when students gather into one location to receive instruction, or the lesson itself, those were not the initial, primary, or majority of the definitions regarding the word *class* in the OED. The majority of the definitions for the word *class* were related in some way or another to the division of people, animals, things, thoughts, and more into categories or groups. In fact, this word originated in as a borrowing from the French *classe* and the Latin *classis* in the 1500s, and both



words refer specifically to the division of people or things into categories or groups. It would seem that the word *class* being related to education originally was only related to the separating of groups of people or things into categories and not related to a lesson or other education-specific concepts. (“class, n. & adj.”)

### **Course, n. & adv.**

Another word related to the previous two words is the word *course*. In its common use related to education today, this word typically is used to refer to a lesson or a collection of lessons. Interestingly, the definitions listed in the OED for this word are primarily related to direction, path, or movement. In fact, the word *course* was borrowed from the French *cours*, *course* and the Latin *cursus*, and can be seen in English beginning in the 1300s, but the word focuses on definitions related to direction, path, or movement. In fact, the borrowed words are also focused primarily on travel, direction, movement, etc. It would be more than 200 years (1500s) before the word starts to be seen in English with a meaning related to education and lessons. Finally, the word begins to be used for this topic, but it is being used specifically in the sense of a series or multiple lessons or lectures, not just one. (“course, n.<sup>1</sup> & adv.<sup>1</sup>”)

### **Curriculum, n.**

Sometimes when discussing a *course* the content of the course is the real topic of interest. To discuss this topic, an individual may need to understand and use the word *curriculum*. The definition in the OED for this noun is “a course; *spec.* a regular course of study or training, as at a school or university” (“curriculum, n.”). The word is usually used to refer specifically to the content of what is taught in the course. The noun is clearly borrowed from Latin, as it even still maintains its Latin form, but this may be due to it having been borrowed somewhat recently. The word first began to be used in English in the 1600s. (“curriculum, n.”)

**School, n.**

Typically, courses, curriculum, lessons, and classes are provided to individuals in a single location. Whether that location is a large campus where hundreds or thousands of students attend their lessons or it is a one-room building or even the individual's home, that location has a name, *school*. Typically, when people think about the word *school* they think of the place where they spent much of their youth in the education system. However, the word *school*, having been used since Old English, can be traced back to its borrowed roots from the Latin words *schola* and *scola*. While these words do refer to a public location, it was originally more referencing a general meeting place, and the words also refer to something that a teacher will present or have presented. As a result, the current word *school* really has not strayed far from its original Latin roots. ("school, n.<sup>1</sup>")

In evaluating the twenty words above, some aspects of the hypothesis were confirmed, and some were not. The theory that thirty percent of the words would have originated in Germanic was not true. In evaluating the information above, only three of the twenty (15%) words were inherited from Germanic. The second part of the hypothesis, that the majority of the words would be based on a Latin or Romance language is true. Of the twenty words chosen, three words were French only origin, five were Latin only origin, and seven were of both French and Latin origin. This brings the total to fifteen (75%) of the words that met this criterion. And the final piece of the hypothesis was that the bulk of the words identified would have originated in Middle English. This aspect was, unfortunately proven false, as only six (30%) of the words analyzed were originated in Middle English.

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