



LABORATOIRE DU GROUPE DE  
RECHERCHE SUR L'AFRIQUE ET LA DIASPORA

**(GRAD)**

Premières Journées d'Etudes Scientifiques  
(en visioconférence)

26 - 27 Mai 2021



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**Thème :**

**L'ENSEIGNEMENT ET LA RECHERCHE DANS LE CONTEXTE DE LA COVID-19 :  
NÉCESSITÉ D'UNE REDÉFINITION DE STRATÉGIES**

**ACTES DU COLLOQUE**

ISBN 978-99982-64-63-2



FACULTE DES  
LETTRES, LANGUES,  
ARTS ET COMMUNICATION

ÉCOLE  
DOCTORALE  
PLURIDISCIPLINAIRE



Novembre 2021

**ACTES**  
des  
**Premières Journées d'Etudes Scientifiques**  
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**26 – 27 mai 2021**

**Thème** : L'enseignement et la Recherche dans le contexte de la  
COVID-19 : Nécessité d'une redéfinition de stratégies

*SOUS LE PARRAINAGE DE*

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## **1. Contexte et justification**

La pandémie de la COVID-19 a indubitablement induit des changements radicaux et profonds dans nos habitudes de vie et dans nos relations interpersonnelles. Pour contenir cette pandémie, la plupart des pays ont adopté des stratégies de confinement total ou partiel, de couvre-feu ou de restrictions dans les déplacements de personnes. Les regards sont désormais tournés vers les écoles et universités en raison de leur forte implication dans la recherche et l'éducation, la formation et la socialisation de la personne humaine. Plusieurs écoles et centres de formation ont été fermés, des congés et vacances scolaires/universitaires ont été anticipés et la reprise n'a eu lieu que timidement.

En raison de cette pandémie, le monde de l'éducation en général et celui de l'enseignement supérieur en particulier connaissent actuellement de grands bouleversements en termes de comment trouver les meilleures méthodologies et stratégies d'enseignement-apprentissage qui conviennent aux directives d'endigement du virus qui a déjà, faut-il le rappeler, contaminé ou tué de

millions de personnes dans le monde. La massification des effectifs dans les formations universitaires classiques telles que les lettres, les langues, les sciences juridiques, les sciences économiques et de gestion, les sciences physiques, les sciences mathématiques et biologiques font craindre une contamination accrue si le virus venait à s'introduire dans nos amphithéâtres.

Heureusement, la vie continue malgré tout et l'enseignement et la recherche dans nos universités et centres de formation le doivent aussi pour assumer la postérité et la prospérité intellectuelles et économique aussi bien que le développement de nos pays. Il s'établit alors une crainte objective par rapport au respect des gestes barrières établis dans nos universités et centres de formations au regard des grands rassemblements en raison du manque d'infrastructures dans certains de nos lieux de formation. Un changement de paradigme dans la formation et la recherche s'avère donc nécessaire.

Plusieurs méthodes de recherche et stratégies pédagogiques aux moyens des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication (TIC) ont été innovées. Il s'agit désormais de l'introduction et de la formation au E- teaching/learning, des cours à distance, de la redynamisation des Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC), de l'utilisation des réseaux sociaux comme canal de transmission du savoir, etc. En matière de recherche, les rencontres scientifiques, autrefois organisées en présentiel sont de plus en plus virtuelles avec l'utilisation des outils tels que Zoom, Google meet, Microsoft team, etc. comme moyens d'interaction.

Les difficultés rencontrées dans la mise en œuvre des stratégies et méthodes d'enseignement en période de la COVID-19 amènent les enseignants- chercheurs et chercheurs à repenser la recherche et la pédagogie universitaires pour ne pas briser la chaîne de la transmission du savoir dans l'espoir que la vie redevienne normale dans les jours à venir. Les *Journées d'Etudes Scientifiques* sont donc l'occasion d'explorer les synergies actuelles en termes de pratiques d'enseignement et de recherche pour une meilleure adaptabilité.

## **2. Objectifs**

### ***2.1. Objectif général***

Ces Journées d'Etudes visent à susciter des réflexions et partage d'expériences chez les enseignants-chercheurs et chercheurs sur les meilleures approches et stratégies à adopter ou à expérimenter pour un enseignement supérieur inclusif

et respectueux du droit des étudiants à un enseignement de qualité d'une part, aussi bien que la réorientation de la recherche en cette période critique de la pandémie de la COVID-19, d'autre part.

## ***2.2.Objectifs spécifiques***

Il s'agit pour les participants de :

- mener des réflexions dans le sens des conduites à tenir pour des cours en ligne réussis dans leurs matières respectives ;
- partager les expériences et expertises de l'utilisation des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication comme support de transmission du savoir ;
- analyser de façon critique la problématique de recherche et de l'enseignement/apprentissage des langues dans un système de cours à distance.
- Conduire des activités de recherche en ligne, seul(e) ou en équipe.

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## Références Bibliographiques

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Searle, J. R. (1976). *A Classification of Illocutionary Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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**IMPRIMERIE**

OGW Editions  
(00229) 97 338 997  
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ISBN : 978-99982-64-63-2  
Dépôt Légal N°13503 du 17/11/2021  
Bibliothèque Nationale du Bénin, 4ème trimestre

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## LEARNING STRATEGIES DEVELOPED IN *RAGGED DICK* BY HORATIO ALGER JR.: A NECESSITY TO REDEFINE NEW STRATEGIES IN PERIOD OF COVID 19.

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### ABSTRACT

Ragged Dick is an orphan, a bootblack and a street boy in the city of New York in the 1860s after the American Civil War. When the novel opens, Dick is fourteen years old. In his daily shoeshine job, he meets Frank Whitney who hires him for New York tour. Frank notices Dick is illiterate and advise him to get educated. Dick works to find money to rent a room he shares with a young bootblack named Henry Fosdick who can read and write. Dick strikes a deal: Dick will pay for Henry Fosdick to stay in his room and Fosdick will tutor him at night. Nine months later, Dick can read and write correctly.

The objective of this paper is to explore the strategies used to teach Dick to read and write in nine months in order to see how such strategies can be readapted to the current context of COVID 19. Constructivism is the theory used to appreciate the teaching techniques used by Henry Fosdick to teach Ragged Dick in a short time. In fact, the sudden appearance of corona virus in 2019 has influenced all sectors of life. In the very field of education, it is impossible today to refer to the nineteenth century methodology used to teach Dick, but the massive use of the TIC is a new alternative to handle teaching or research. Even though the use of the TIC is still a challenge for research and teaching, it is the only technique likely to favor exchange and technological innovations.

**Keywords:** Dick, read, write, COVID 19, TIC, innovations, Behaviorism.

### RESUME

Ragged Dick est un orphelin, un cireur de chaussures et un garçon de la rue de la ville de New York dans les années 1860 après la guerre de Sécession. Au début du roman, Dick a quatorze ans. Dans son travail quotidien de cireur de chaussures, il rencontre Frank Whitney qui l'engage comme guide pour une tournée dans la ville de New York. Frank remarque que Dick est analphabète et lui conseille de s'instruire. Dick travaille pour trouver de l'argent pour louer une chambre qu'il partage avec un jeune cireur de chaussures nommé Henry Fosdick qui sait lire et écrire. Dick conclut un accord : Dick se charge du loyer, Henry Fosdick reste dans sa chambre et pour lui donner des cours du soir en compensation. Neuf mois plus tard, Dick sait lire et écrire correctement.

L'objectif de cet article est d'explorer les stratégies utilisées pour apprendre à Dick à lire et à écrire en neuf mois afin de voir comment de telles stratégies peuvent être réadaptées au contexte actuel de COVID 19. Le Constructivisme est la théorie utilisée pour apprécier la méthodologie utilisée par Henry Fosdick pour enseigner Ragged Dick en si peu de temps. En fait, l'apparition soudaine du virus corona en 2019 a influencé tous les secteurs de la vie. Dans le domaine même de l'éducation, il est impossible aujourd'hui de se référer à la méthodologie du XIXe siècle utilisée pour enseigner Dick, mais l'utilisation massive des TIC est une nouvelle alternative pour

gérer l'enseignement ou la recherche. Même si l'utilisation des TIC reste un défi pour la recherche et l'enseignement, elle demeure la seule technique susceptible de favoriser les échanges et les innovations technologiques.

**Mots-clés :** Dick, lire, écrire, COVID 19, TIC, innovations, Behaviorisme.

## INTRODUCTION

*Ragged Dick* was published in 1867. The plot is simple: an adolescent illiterate boy or young man, forced by circumstances beyond his control to make his own way in life, gradually overcomes difficulties because of his honesty, work ethic, and occasional help from older men who recognize the protagonist's potential. In this process, he has found it necessary to learn to read and write with the help another called Henry Fosdick.

The objective of this research bootblack paper is to appreciate the methodology used to teach Dick and the brilliant result achieved in nine months. This evaluation is carried out throughout the Constructivism theory. Constructivism is a learning theory based on the notion that students actively construct knowledge. This view of learning calls for a dramatic declining of reliance on a didactic, textbook-based, transmission of knowledge approach to teaching and learning in the classroom. It is based on the premise that we construct learning new ideas based on our own prior knowledge and experiences. Learning, therefore, is unique to the individual learner. Students adapt their models of understanding either by reflecting on prior theories or resolving misconceptions. In *Ragged Dick* the teaching process is a strange one because carried out by an amateur: a twelve-year old bootblack who devotes very few evening hours to teaching activities. Though he does not own a degree at school, he happens to teach what he knows. The results are amazing: within nine months, Dick can read and write, he is good at mathematics and geography. The bootblack teacher, Henry Fosdick's teaching process is not formal but efficient. The time is short but the outcome is praiseworthy. This experience took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but can inspire today when covid 19 has changed our daily lives, our teaching and learning habits too.

This paper is centered around *Ragged Dick* before he could start learning and writing, his learning process and the strategies used; the results of his learning and the consequences of his informal education.

## 1. Ragged Dick Before Education

Ragged Dick is a fourteen-year-old shoeshine boy, a street boy in New York. He works for his living on the streets of New York. He shines and polishes the shoes of people who pass by. But despite his honesty, initiative and hard work, he almost always sits without a penny in his pocket because he habitually spends his earnings as soon as he gets them. He smokes, drinks occasionally, and sleeps on the streets but he is anxious to turn over a new leaf, and try to grow up "spectable". 'Spectable' is the word used by Dick for 'respectable'. It appears for the first time on page 14 and is used 13 times throughout the novel. He won't steal under any circumstances, and many gentlemen who are impressed with this virtue and his determination to succeed offer their aid.

As a street boy, 'his bedchamber had been a wooden box half full of straw' as described on page 4 of the novel. His physical appearance at the beginning of the novel is not an attractive one:

His pants were torn in several places, and had apparently belonged in the first instance to a boy two sizes larger than himself. He wore a vest, all the buttons of which were gone except two, out of which peeped a shirt which looked as if it had been worn a month. To complete his costume he wore a coat too long for him, dating back, if one might judge from its general appearance, to a remote antiquity. (Alger, 1864, p.4).

In fact, this miserable appearance is the result of his misfortune: he is an orphan. When Frank Whitney asks about his parents, Dick replies in the following dialogue:

"I aint got no mother. She died when I wasn't but three years old.

My father went to sea; but he went off before mother died, and nothin' was ever heard of him. I expect he got wrecked, or died at sea.

-"And what became of you when your mother died?"

"The folks she boarded with took care of me, but they was poor, and they couldn't do much. When I was seven the woman died, and her husband went out West, and then I had to scratch for myself". (Alger, 1864, p.51)

However, Dick has the essential prerequisite to success for, "He was above doing anything mean or dishonorable. He would not steal, or cheat, or impose upon younger boys, but was frank and straight-forward, manly and self-reliant. His nature was a noble one and had saved him from all mean faults" can be read on page 8 of the novel. His frank and straight-forward manner lead people to trust him despite his shabby appearance. Such trust helps him get shoe-shine customers as well as other opportunities. For example, a gentleman (Mr. Whitney) asks him to guide his nephew (Frank Whitney) around the city for a day because he likes Dick's honest looks. His wit and ability to laugh at himself

and his circumstances also put people at ease. However Dick suffers a handicap: he is totally illiterate, not because he wants it but he cannot afford it as he explains in the following words: "I can't go to school 'cause I've got my livin' to earn. It wouldn't do me much good if I learned to read and write, and just as I'd got learned I starved to death." (Alger, 1864, p.54) Frank Whitney has convinced him about the necessity to get educated. He encourages him to write: "Never mind. I want you to write. When you write you can tell me how to direct, and I will send you a letter." (Alger, 1864, 79) Ragged Dick is convinced, a new ambition is then created deep in his psyche.

## **2. Ragged Dick's Determination to Get Educated**

Having determined to learn to read and write, Dick decides not to squander his money on entertainment, but instead looks to rent a room on Mott Street. In fact, teaching-learning materials are necessary for teaching to take place. They are the materials used by the instructors in imparting information in terms of academic subjects and concepts to the students. These are regarded as not only fundamental in enriching the teaching-learning processes, but also in leading to the overall functioning of the educational institutions in an effective manner. Before the classroom objects can be efficient, a classroom is an absolute necessity. Dick is a street boy, he has no home. Consequently he decides to rent a house for seventy-five cents a week at Mott Street in order to welcome his teacher who happens to be a bootblack too, younger than him. Dick then invites Henry Fosdick to join him in exchange for teaching him to read and write.

### ***2.1. Henry Fosdick's Educational Background***

Henry Fosdick is a street boy and a bootblack in New York. He is sharing the same precarious life with all the other street boys. He is twelve. Sometimes, Dick offers him generously food to eat. He has no home. When Dick asks him where he is sleeping, he says sadly: "I don't know". "In some doorway, I expect. But I'm afraid the police will find me out, and make me move on." (Alger, 1864, p.103) He is an orphan and confesses that he had comfort when his father was alive. His father got drowned from a Fulton ferry-boat. However, he is luckier than Dick because his father was a printer. When Dick asks him if he can read and write well, he replies: "Yes," then he adds: "Father always kept me at school when he was alive, and I stood pretty well in my classes. I was expecting to enter at the Free Academy next year." (Alger, 1864, p.105)

In fact, Dick's young tutor is well qualified to instruct him. Henry Fosdick, though only twelve years old, is well equipped intellectually to teach people older than him. He has always been studious and ambitious to excel. His father, being a printer, employed in an office where books were printed. He often brought home new books in sheets, which Henry was always glad to read. Mr. Fosdick had been, besides, a subscriber to the Mechanics' Apprentices' Library, which contains many thousands of well-selected and instructive books. Thus Henry Fosdick had acquired an amount of general information, unusual in a boy of his age. Perhaps he had devoted too much time to study, for he is not naturally robust. All this, however, fits him admirably for the office to which Dick appoints him, that of his private instructor. Dick is not wrong when he strikes the following bargain with Henry Fosdick:

"I'll make a bargain with you. I can't read much more'n a pig; and my writin' looks like hens' tracks. I don't want to grow up knowin' no more'n a four-year-old boy. If you'll teach me readin' and writin' evenin's, you shall sleep in my room every night. That'll be better'n door-steps or old boxes, where I've slept many a time." (Alger, 1864, p. 105)

Fosdick has agreed because it is a good opportunity for him to leave street. The second advantage for Fosdick is related to the fact he is not compelled to pay for the room, in exchange he has to teach Dick. The bargain is profitable for both because Fosdick is offered a shelter free of charge whereas Dick is taught to read and write without any other additional fees. Both bootblacks have taken a new way to social change because they have left street to enter a room even though it is not a comfortable one. Anyway it is a walk forward to reach a higher social ladder.

## 2.2. *The Teaching Itself*

Before the teaching session starts, Dick has 'bought a copy of a weekly paper, filled with the usual variety of reading matter, stories, sketches, poems, etc. (*ibid.*) When they get home they prepare for teaching; they sit at a rickety table with the paper in front. Fosdick asks for a rod to punish Dick if he does not do well. It is the traditional pattern, teachers used to beat students when they made mistakes. Fosdick can start his teaching with a good pedagogical strategy: he refers to a diagnostic assessment. A diagnostic assessment is a form of pre-assessment where teachers can evaluate students' strengths, weaknesses, knowledge and skills before their instruction. With this form of assessment, teachers can plan meaningful and efficient instructions and can provide learners with an individualized learning experience. Written by learners, the diagnostic

assessment is a tool for teachers to better understand what learners already know about a topic when the tests are usually administered at the beginning of a course. Fosdick starts with the following dialogue:

"Now, Dick," said Fosdick, "before we begin, I must find out how much you already know. Can you read any?"

"Not enough to hurt me," said Dick. "All I know about readin' you could put in a nutshell, and there'd be room left for a small family."

"I suppose you know your letters?"

"Yes," said Dick, "I know 'em all, but not intimately. I guess I can call 'em all by name."

"Where did you learn them? Did you ever go to school?"

"Yes; I went two days."

"Why did you stop?"

"It didn't agree with my constitution." (Alger, 1864, pp.107-108)

Fosdick knows how far he has gone to school. Then he knows from where to start to get a good result. The teaching-learning takes an hour this evening, then Fosdick appreciates on page 109: "You're learning fast, Dick. "At this rate you will soon learn to read well." Fosdick has evaluated Ragged Dick after this session to see how far he has learnt and his potential to learn. Fosdick's appreciation can be assimilated to a formative evaluation. He has not submitted Dick to a written test to appreciate. But in terms of evaluation, it can be either written or oral. Fosdick is not a professional teacher, surely he cannot explain the essence of his actions: they are interpreted, explained in accordance with the results he has come to. In this frame, we can qualify his conclusion as an outcome of a formative assessment. As a matter of fact, an evaluation is described as formative when the intention is to identify scope and potential for improvement. An assignment is formatively assessed when the comments that the teacher makes to the student are intended to bring about improvement in the following submitted work. According to Bloom, by 'formative evaluation we mean evaluation by brief tests used by teachers and students as aids in the learning processes' (Bloom, 1969). An assessment is formative when the outcome is a list of suggestions and decisions for action, and for development. It is about all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Fosdick is not a professional teacher but his methodology is somehow acceptable.

Nine months later Henry Fosdick appreciates Dick:

But Dick had gained something more valuable than money. He had studied regularly every evening, and his improvement had been marvellous. He could now read well, write a fair hand, and had studied arithmetic as far as Interest. Besides this he had obtained some knowledge of grammar and geography. If some of my boy readers, who have been studying for years, and got no farther than this, should

think it incredible that Dick, in less than a year, and studying evenings only, should have accomplished it, they must remember that our hero was very much in earnest in his desire to improve. (Alger, 1864, p.137)

This appreciation from Dick's teacher can be assimilated to what is known as summative assessment in pedagogy. In fact, assessment of learning is known as summative assessment when this typically occurs at the end of a topic or period of pupil development. It often provides a quantitative score or measure against outcomes after the learning is complete. Summative assessments not only provide a measure of progress, but also empower pupils to develop their skills as learners. Fosdick who has facilitated the teaching-learning process for nine months, he who has guided and developed learning through a sequence of activities has come to the above mentioned conclusion. The performance is a satisfactory one: Dick is equipped with a set of knowledge in reading and writing as well as in grammar and geography. Dick has been prepared to face some new challenges in life: he has left the very world of illiterate young bootblacks wandering along the streets of New York.

### *2.3. Ragged Dick can Read and Write Letters*

Dick has received a letter from Frank Whitney. It is advertised in Daily Sun. The next day Dick has gone to the post office to get the letter. He could read it delightfully:

Dick read this letter with much satisfaction. It is always pleasant to be remembered, and Dick had so few friends that it was more to him than to boys who are better provided. Again, he felt a new sense of importance in having a letter addressed to him. It was the first letter he had ever received. If it had been sent to him a year before, he would not have been able to read it. But now, thanks to Fosdick's instructions, he could not only read writing, but he could write a very good hand himself. (Alger, 1864, p. 168)

Ragged Dick can enjoy his capacity to read and write. He is not an unknown poor lad in New York, the door of knowledge is open to him and he can communicate with people very far away from New York. This elevation can sharpen his ambition and determination to become a respectable person in his society. He undertakes to write a letter in response to Franck Whitney. It is Dick's first trial. He is first hesitant, doubtful but eager to reply. Fosdick encourages him, he devotes the evening to reply writing. Here is an extract of his reply:

"I've got so as to read pretty well, so my tooter says. I've been studyin' geography and grammar also. I've made such astonishin' progress that I can tell a noun from a conjunction as far away as I can see 'em. Tell Mr. Munroe that if he wants an accomplished teacher in his school, he can send for me, and I'll come on by the very next train. Or, if he wants to sell out for a hundred dollars, I'll buy the whole concern,

and agree to teach the scholars all I know myself in less than six months. (Alger, 1864, p.173)

Very proud and boastful, Ragged Dick has made an enormous progress in nine months to show that it is possible to teach and learn in difficult and informal conditions if people are determined to acquire knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

Ragged Dick, a fourteen years old bootblack street boy has been taught to read and write in nine months by a twelve years old bootblack street boy called Henry Fosdick. The result of their interaction is surprising one: Ragged Dick can read and write in less than a year. Henry Fosdick is not a professional teacher, however he can use some teaching tools such as diagnostic assessment, formative assessment as well as summative assessment in his teaching process. He knows how to motivate a learner and the material he can use to reach his goals. With the use of behaviorism theory, Dick's experience has shed light on the possibility to teach and learn in particularly difficult circumstances. With the advent of Covid 19 when being grouped can be source of virus transmission, it is possible and plausible to refer to special techniques to go about teaching-learning process. The case in Ragged Dick is a remote old-fashioned experience that can inspire. In fact, Dick has not been taught in normal conditions before being able to learn to read and write in a short time. Covid 19 has changed our habits in terms of teaching and learning. It is happy to notice that today's world is full of technological devices likely to make interactions easier in all domains and in the very field of teaching-learning in particular. Covid-19 has restricted our daily span in terms of teaching activities and research but it has also created some innovative ways to do things in better ways. Online sources, visio conferences and other tools are available to facilitate communication. Whatever the case may be, it is an absolute necessity to find ways and means to transmit knowledge for the evolution of science and the well-being of humanity. It is a matter of survival.

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