A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL THEORIES OF

CHARLES DICKENS AND JOHN HOLT

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

By

Loreta S. Milner, B. S.
Denton, Texas
May, 1974
Loreta S. Milner, A Comparative Analysis of the Educational Theories of Charles Dickens and John Holt. Master of Science (Secondary Education), May, 1974, Denton, Texas, 111 pp., bibliography, 83 titles.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether Charles Dickens's educational theories in England during the nineteenth century are conclusively juxtaposed to John Holt's educational theories in America during the twentieth century.

Chapter One introduces the proposition and states the general nature of the discussion in subsequent chapters. Chapter Two presents a history of economic conditions in nineteenth-century England and shows how its evolution influenced Dickens's educational theories. Chapter Three discusses the economic conditions in twentieth-century America, the moral crisis and its affect on youth, and Holt's theories of how children fail and how they learn. Chapter Four synthesizes Dickens's and Holt's theories and establishes that their philosophies and aims in the field of education are closely juxtaposed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. CHARLES DICKENS, THE PRECURSOR OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions in England During the Nineteenth Century</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating Factors in Dickens's Concern for Children and Their Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dickens's Theories on Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. JOHN HOLT, CHAMPION OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions in America</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holt's Theories on Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Children Fail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Children Learn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE THEORIES OF CHARLES DICKENS AND JOHN HOLT</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

America in 1789 promised its people a new way of life; each individual was to be a free man, each having the right to seek his own happiness. There was to be a republican form of government in which the people would be sovereign; there was to be no arbitrary power over people's lives. In less than two-hundred years this dream has been lost. The belief in self interest, competitiveness, and suspicion of others has led to the corruption of American life and government. Invention, machinery, and production constitute progress; one can be happy only if he attains material success; nature is beautiful, but only if it is conquered and put to use.¹

Prior to the advent of the Industrial Revolution, most people lived, worked, and died in the same place, among familiar people they saw every day. There was no division between work and living. The scale of everything was small; there were no large, impersonal institutional complexes such as apartments, factories, or hospitals. Man's economic activity

was rooted in and subordinate to his social system. Customs or religion regulated all aspects of life. Play, ritual, art, and ceremony all were integrated activities to make a wholesome life. This world both in England and in America was destroyed in the making of a modern world.\(^2\)

The people who suffer most in America's new moral crisis are the youth. And the youth spend more time and are more greatly influenced by the educational institutions than by any other element in American society. John Holt explores this moral crisis, its influence on children and how the schools are failing to meet the children's needs during this period.

This study will examine and relate the educational theories of John Holt, a renowned educator in the progressive philosophy of freedom in the classroom, to those of Charles Dickens in England during the nineteenth century. Research reveals that nineteenth-century England, as America, experienced a moral crisis due to its Industrial Revolution. This crisis manifested itself in social and economic changes which caused a vortex of material struggles, remonstrations against the neglect of human dignity and the exploitations of individual worth. Charles Dickens provided a distinct voice for these protests, and children and their school life was his forte.\(^3\)

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 27-28.

\(^3\)John Manning, *Dickens on Education* (Toronto, 1959), p. 3.
This paper will present the theories of Charles Dickens and John Holt in their respective campaigns against the inequities of educational institutions. The primary purpose of the study will be to confirm the apperception that Dickens's and Holt's educational beliefs and goals are closely juxtaposed. To effect this purpose, the second chapter will present a history of the economic conditions in nineteenth-century England; it will examine external and internal factors that motivated Dickens in his struggle for children's rights in their social and educational environment. The chapter will then outline Dickens's theories on education. The third chapter begins by discussing the economic conditions in America during the twentieth century and proceeds later to correlate Holt's educational theories of how children fail and how children learn. The fourth chapter attempts to synthesize both men's theories in an effort to establish that even though Dickens's and Holt's writings and speeches were separated in time by more than one-hundred years, they were so closely related that they could have been the works of a single author.
CHAPTER II

CHARLES DICKENS, THE PRECURSOR OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION

Charles Dickens's emergence as a champion for social concerns in England probably began with his publication of the *Pickwick Papers* in 1836. He became an ardent defender of the poor, neglected, unfortunate, uneducated, and exploited segments of society. He, however, was not alone in this endeavor to abate social injustice. Along with Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, and Elizabeth Gaskell, writers such as William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Elizabeth Browning, and Thomas Carlyle sought to expose the deplorable conditions of human suffering in England in the early nineteenth century.¹

Dickens was to the nineteenth century what Sir Richard Steele and Joseph Addison were to the eighteenth century. All three of these men in their writings attempted to bring about a public awareness of the social inequities of the day. While Dickens was very influential as a champion for many social concerns, this paper will be confined to his influence upon education. This section of the paper will show Dickens's

¹Manning, p. 13.
significance to education by examining three questions: (1) What type conditions existed in England in the nineteenth century? (2) What motivated Dickens's concern for children and their education? and (3) What were Dickens's theories of education?

Conditions in England During the Nineteenth Century

Dickens very aptly described the period in The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club: "Travelling was in a troubled state, and the minds of coachmen were unsettled. ... stage coaches were upsetting. ... horses were bolting, boats were overturning, and boilers were bursting."² And the July 1, 1849, issue of The Law Magazine echoed Dickens: "Society is in a state of transition; strange new doctrines, and stranger revival of old ones, perplex men's minds which are themselves in the infancy of reflection."³

As evidenced by history, almost every generation experiences a period of transition; some periods envelop swifter changes than others. New customs circumvent the old; yet, old customs many times co-exist with the new and even in some instances tend to predominate the new environment. This transition was true of the nineteenth century, particularly the Victorian period, the period in which Dickens lived.

³Manning, p. 3.
A dynamic industrialized society was quickly replacing the slower, easy-going rural life. From this rapid transition emanated discontent, struggles, and protests against the stripping away of human dignity. Charles Dickens provided the voice for these protests, especially in the field of education.

The schools are a reflection of the society. However, the classroom is often several generations behind the changes in society. It is against this background of change that Dickens's philosophy of education should be studied. Consideration should be given to such matters as "communication, living conditions, religious convictions, political unrest, and philosophic ideas." 4

Dickens's life spanned a period from the old stage-coach to the heyday of steam. Nicholas Nickleby 5 and Dombey and Son 6 were the first novels to include references to the railways. The Stockton and Dartington Railway had opened in 1825 amid much fanfare. 7 The arrival of the steam engine had a great industrial and social impact: "Excursion trains chugged out of the stations, their coaches jammed with shouting, singing, grimy-faced, tousle-headed youngsters; they pulled

4Ibid.

5Charles Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby (New York, 1918), p. 213.

6Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (New York, 1885), p. 67.

into what was formerly an exclusive seaside resort to emit a seething mass of humanity hastening to clamber on the donkeys, pushing among the pink parasols of their betters in a rush to reach the Punch and Judy show, and knocking over little 'ladies' daintily gathering little pink and white shells for souvenirs." While Dickens did write about such occasions, he failed to capture the vivid descriptions of the scene. He was more interested in the solemn aspects of society, particularly the improvement of poverty.

In addition to the advent of the railroad, the electric telegraph escalated communication for industry, and at last penny postage afforded an inexpensive means for correspondence between the poor. The Victorian practice of reading aloud in parlors was enriched by new publications such as the Penny Magazine, Chambers's Journal, Children's Little Guides. The Industrial Revolution also brought with it the migration of many Irish laborers, the revamping of new poor-laws, the enclosing of more and more public commons, along with the impotency of local authorities and administration of government. Benjamin Disraeli described these conditions in his Sybil in 1845: there are two Englands, the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer.

---

8Manning, p. 4.


10Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil (London, 1845), pp. 61-77, 198-199, 262.
One England encompassed the snobbish, lackadaisical aristocrats and the rich-smug, unsympathetic upper middle class. It is true that these two groups did occasionally aid the workers in their struggle for a better life, but the assistance was too infinitesimal to warrant much acknowledgment. The other England included the lower middle class with its lack of education and general inability to develop any political sagacity; the remote farm laborers; and the vast population of toiling factory workers.

The workhouses of this other England were solicited for "apprentices" to work in the mills; strappers were always present to keep them awake and quasi-alert for their unbearable tasks.\textsuperscript{11} The Report of the Commissioners covering the trades and manufacturers of 1843 revealed that children given the job of opening and closing the trap doors in the coal pits were forced to work alone and continuously for twelve hours in the dark, with no place to rest but the damp floor. Many other equally startling stories were given in the report. One girl was assigned the task of "hurrying" large tubs of coal over a distance of a mile for at least eleven hours per shift. A belt around her waist was chained to the barrel of coal as she crawled through dark, damp tunnels dragging this burden with her; if her movements became too slow she would

be beaten by naked "getters" who had the job of loosening the coal.  

The factory conditions were also abominable. Disraeli portrays the children's deplorable situation in *Sybil*: He tells the story of a boy placed in a "baby farm" where he was administered massive doses of treacle and laudanum. Surviving this ordeal, he was then placed in the street to play where he again escaped the expected crushing by the horses' feet. Managing to flee the damp, fever-infested corpses in the damp cellar where he had been placed to sleep "with a dunghill at his head and a cess-pool at his feet," the boy at only five was immersed into the masses of the factory. He did have an advantage over many of his fellow workers; he was afforded a meagre education at the factory school.  

Gradually these factory conditions were improved by the Factory, Poor Law and Municipal Acts. The Factory Act of 1802 limited a child's work-day to twelve hours. The Act of 1803 further helped by stipulating that no child under nine years of age could be employed. Even though the intent of these acts was sincere, the laws were not effective because there was no compulsory birth registration, and these acts applied only to textile factories. Finally, the passage of the Factory Acts of 1864 and 1867 offered some real relief.

12 Ibid., XV (London, 1842), 21, 26, 66, 80, 98.
13 Disraeli, pp. 99-114.
Children under thirteen could not work more than a half-day and a factory schoolmaster could be disqualified for his "incapacity to teach the children to read and write, for his gross ignorance, or for his not having the materials necessary to teach reading and writing, or because of his immoral conduct."  

Dickens's Mr. Pickwick and Queen Victoria made their debuts about the same time as the appearance of the machines in industry. And with the arrival of the factory came the industrial worker, who probably was a member of London's Working Men's Association founded by Lovett and Place in 1836. In an attempt to cope with the conditions associated with the Industrial Revolution, the industrial workers banned together. Frequently, it seemed, the legislators and courts were not sympathetic toward the cause of the worker. Any efforts to break through this apparent legislative sciolism proved ineffectual and frustrating for the industrial workers. Dickens, in his story of the Chorley Brothers, illustrates the hardships encountered by adults and children seeking an education. These young men worked from morning until night in a coal-pit and then walked eight miles three nights a week.

---


15 Michalina Vaughan and Margaret Scotford Archer, Social Conflict and Educational Change in England and France 1789-1848 (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 41-44.
in all types of weather to attend classes. Still another boy, a plasterer of sixteen years, walked six miles each night to attend school; and a moulder in an iron foundry arose at four o'clock each morning to study before leaving for his twelve-hour day at the furnace. Most similar attempts of workers' children to gain an education proved just as futile; the only recourse they found was an occasional session at the Sunday Schools, charity schools, or the too-expensive dame-schools or common day-schools.

This period in the life of the workers seemed to be a continuous oscillation of disasters and hopes. The Anti-Combination Acts, forbidding workers to organize, was repealed in 1824. And in 1834 the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union was initiated. But the struggle to organize experienced blow after blow from high taxes on periodicals, and transportation to the colonies by workers who were alleged members of unions. The Poor Law of 1834 attempted to impede employers taking advantage of the local poor-law subsidies, but in reality it ruthlessly cut off outdoor relief to all able-bodied men. This adversely affected the temporarily unemployed worker; he had two choices: he and his family

---


could starve, or the worker could assent to life in the workhouse where he would be separated from his wife and children, despoiled of beer and tobacco, and prevented from even playing cards--reduced to the status of a perennial loafer.\textsuperscript{19} In spite of the seemingly endless setbacks, the industrial workers exhibited great stamina. They continued to work for more and better schools, cheaper newspapers, more humane poor-laws, permission to organize, and a greater part in the government. The Chartist movement was a voice for these efforts until the repression and lack of leadership caused its decline in 1848.\textsuperscript{20} Even though the Chartist movement failed, it gave impetus to Dickens's campaign for political, sanitary and education reforms.

As an outgrowth of the Industrial Revolution during this period, the slums permeated almost every section of the towns. Thousands of people migrating to the urban areas accelerated the already existing problems of housing, health, and sanitation. J. L. Hammond stated that large families were crowded into one-room tenements, garrets, run-down cellars, rat-infested, cholera-ridden houses at exhorbitant rentals. And this influx of population encouraged the speculative builder.

Mr. Hammond further described the situation:

An immense number of small houses occupied by the poorer classes in the suburbs of Manchester are

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., pp. 95-115.
\textsuperscript{20}Vaughan and Archer, p. 44.
of the most superficial character, they are built by the members of building clubs and other individuals, and new cottages are erected with a rapidity that astonishes persons who are unacquainted with their flimsy structure. They have certainly avoided the objectionable mode of forming underground dwellings, but have run into the opposite extreme, having neither cellar nor foundation. The walls are only half brick thick, or what bricklayers call 'brick noggin,' and the whole of the materials are slight and unfit for the purpose. . . . They are built back to back; without ventilation or drainage; and, like a honeycomb, every particle of space is occupied. Double rows of these houses form courts, with, perhaps, a pump at one end and a privy at the other, common to the occupants of about twenty houses.21

The hard fight against the industrial slums and disease such as cholera was fought by such men as Sir Edwin Chadwick, in his report of 1842; John Delaney, through his articles in The Times, May, 1841; Lord Ashley and others in Parliament; and by such novelists as Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, and Elizabeth Gaskell.22 These were the men and women who did not believe that the "misery of their great society was beyond the reach of human misery remedy."23

While Dickens as well as others wrote about the poor, uneducated industrial society, it must be noted that there was still another part of England worthy of literary comment. Wax works and charming ballets had attained notable respectability. Exclusive clubs like Almack's, featuring such celebrities as Johann Strauss, were patronized by invitation only.

21Hammond, pp. 53-54.


23Ibid., p. 65.
But even Dickens's ephemeral references to the elite of society had an air of lower-class life.

Dickens noted:

Miss Evans's young men escort her to the Grecian Saloon, where to the lilt of the military band 'the waiters were rushing to and fro with glasses of negus, and glasses of brandy and water; ginger beer was going off in one place, and practical jokes going on in another... The whole scene was as Miss J'mima Evans, inspired by the novelty, or the Shrub, or both, observed--one of dazzling excitement.'

The profligates of the alleys, the harlots and prostitutes of the fashionable quarter or the saloons probably belonged to both echelons of Victorian society.

The supple strawberry girls balancing large baskets on their heads, the old watchman with his lantern, the dustman's bell, the wily costermongers, the cries of the lavender girl, the pieman, the organ grinder, or the ballad singer betokened an age that was passing; trains, steamships, plumbing, safety matches, photography, telegraphy, and the great Exhibition 1851 symbolized the new era that was dawning.

The country had contrasts too. The new poor-laws had so disabled the farmer that he could earn only ten or eleven shillings a week. The children aided by opening and closing gates for travellers, scaring birds away from the cornfields with clappers of wood--but this netted only a few pennies for the indigent farmer. The country boasted a number of rural sophistocates. Their refinement and taste

---


25 Manning, p. 10.

26 Lambert, p. 147.
were reflected in all their social functions. One could find at his disposal affluence, courtesy, friendliness, company or even solitude. The rural aristocrats owned elaborate liveries and horses ridden by powdered footmen. The country gentlemen were served formal evening meals on gold plates in the company of prominent ladies and gentlemen. The son of this type country family was expected to attend either Eton or Harrow.

Whether one was in the country or in the city, the bill of fare was laissez-faire and utilitarianism. This philosophy encouraged little interference by either legislators or moralists. Any overt action initiated by legislators was primarily for their own benefit and pleasure. Eventually, some men began to question the inconsistency of the Parliament. It practiced a hands-off policy for manufacturers, but at the same time forbid factory workers from uniting. In response to the people's dissatisfaction of Parliament's action, the Parliament loosened restrictions on import of corn and began to limit the maximum hours of employment, instigated laws on sanitation, and issued grants to education.

Along with the changes in economic and political policies, England also experienced changes in its ethical and cultural

---


theories. This change in philosophy prompted society to relax its harshness toward children. Writers such as George Cruikshank, Hans Anderson, William Thackeray, and Lewis Carroll began writing fantasy stories for children's pleasure. And of course Dickens was a forerunner in the field of children's literature.

Understandably, religious doctrines also were being challenged and modified. Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 caused inquiring intellects to study seriously the wonders of creation. The Established Church of England no longer held a close affinity with aristocratic government, conservatism, and great land owners. No longer was England under the control of the Church.

In essence, the hard materialism of the Victorian period in England caused human beings to be regarded as very cheap, as mere tools. Such a climate as that of the Industrial Revolution inevitably would produce a breakdown in moral, political, social, and religious philosophies. Dickens was outraged at the complacency of society, the denial of individual human dignity, and ultimately, the detriment of society. Dickens courageously aligned himself


\[31\] Routh, pp. 37-39.

with the defenseless workers and the exploited children. Soon he found himself attacking, through his writings, the despotic manufacturers; the Established Church for its prohibiting the poor the simple pleasures such as visiting parks, gardens and art galleries; and the complacent legislature for its laissez-faire attitude toward the nefarious conditions of food, housing, sanitation, working conditions, and education.  

Motivating Factors in Dickens's Concern for Children and their Education

This section of the paper will attempt to show first that Dickens was motivated through his own childhood and early adulthood experiences and second that he was greatly influenced by the deplorable educational conditions of the Victorian era.

Charles Dickens was born at Portsmouth, England, on February 7, 1812, to John Dickens, a clerk in the Navy Pay Office at Portsmouth. While facts of his early life remain very scarce, Dickens's letters do provide some information about his residences. In one letter to Dr. Künzel, July, 1838, Dickens mentioned that he was in London when he was two years old. John Dickens later

---


34 Walter Dexter, ed., The Letters of Charles Dickens, II (Bloomsbury, 1938), 778 ff.

moved his family to Fitzroy Square, on the east side of Middlesex Hospital. In the letter of 1838 to Dr. Künzel, Dickens remarked that he was six when he left London for Chatham and remained there for twelve years. Since the senior Mr. Dickens was well established in the Navy Pay Office at Chatham, it is surmised that Charles enjoyed many happy experiences while they lived at Ordnance Terrace. Robert Langton stated that Dickens's playmates included his sister Fanny and next-door neighbors George and Lucy Stronghill. George seems to be characterized as young Steerforth in *David Copperfield*. Lucy Stronghill apparently was a favorite friend of Dickens.

Dickens, frail and reserved, was an observer rather than a participant in activities. He chose such games as marbles, cricket, pegtop; and often he chose to read rather than to play. Dickens's love for reading seems to contradict John Forster's statement that Dickens's parents contributed very little to his education. However, Forster does note that Dickens remarked that "his first desire for knowledge, and his earliest passion for reading, were awakened

---

by his mother, who taught him the first rudiments not only in English, but also a little later, of Latin."³⁹ Robert Langton further substantiates this belief that Dickens was taught and encouraged by his mother by recounting a statement by Mary Weller, a housekeeper and friend of the Dickens family. She stated that Dickens "was a terrible boy to read and had certainly not been to school, but had been thoroughly well taught by his aunt and mother."⁴⁰

During this period at Ordnance Terrace, Dickens had other pleasurable experiences. He frequently visited the Mitre-Inn where he stood on a table and sang or recited for the audience gathered in the inn. Dickens had a better introduction to the theatre when his father took him to the Royal Theatre in neighboring Rochester.⁴¹

It is interesting to note that Forster minimizes the education Dickens received from his mother and also avoids mentioning the happy boyhood Dickens enjoyed at Chatham. Despite the conjectures and inconsistencies of Dickens's early childhood, it is agreed by most biographers that in 1821 Dickens began to attend a school, Barton Hall, conducted by a Mr. Giles of Chatham. Giles was known as a "reader and elocutionist." The school, first held in a house on Clover

³⁹John Forster, Life of Charles Dickens, I (Philadelphia, 1872), 26 ff.
Lane, was attended by children of the members of the garrison. Theatricals, which Dickens early learned to appreciate, were continued here.\textsuperscript{42} It was while at this school that he had access to "that little room upstairs" mentioned in \textit{David Copperfield}.\textsuperscript{43}

Since Dickens spoke so highly of Giles's school, it would be interesting to know exactly what was taught at the school. But there seems to be no information available. It is known that Giles had been the master of several schools preceding this tenure at Chatham. He apparently had been master at St. Aldergate's School, Oxford; a boarding-school at Patricroft; Gentlemen's Academy in Manchester; Seacombe House, Cheshire; and Netherleigh House, Chester.\textsuperscript{44} Barton Hall was classified as a "classical, mathematical, and commercial" institution. English, commercial studies, modern languages, science, mathematics, and classical studies were included in the curriculum at Barton Hall. Classical studies included a daily schedule of reading Greek and Latin, and writing prose and poetry. The physical plant of the school provided a laboratory, a gymnasium, an archery, and a playing-field.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., p. 14.

\textsuperscript{43}Forster, \textit{Life}, I, 38.

\textsuperscript{44}Arthur Lee Humphreys, \textit{Charles Dickens and his First Schoolmaster} (Manchester, 1925), p. 9.

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., pp. 10-11.
The description of Barton Hall appears to be very similar to that of the other schools where Giles had been master. An announcement for one of Giles's schools seems to substantiate Dickens's deference to Giles and his schools:

The domestic treatment will be paternal and liberal, the Instruction in accordance with the Pupil's prospects in life; and the Masters will be men of tried talent, experience and character. . . .

Dickens's respect for Giles was evidently shared by many of the other students. On Giles's fiftieth birthday his pupils gave him a silver tea-service and a testimonial for his "tact, energy, and facility. . . in developing the moral and intellectual faculties of his pupils." Other commendations were presented to Giles for his "care and fidelity as a tutor," his "uniform kindness and parental care," and his "sterling beneficial instruction." One of Dickens's letters stated that Giles called him "a boy of capacity." A brother of Giles and a former schoolmate of Dickens also praised Dickens. He recalled Dickens's manly and generous qualities and his "sound and truthful views of the evils of society."

46 Ibid., p. 12.
47 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
48 Forster, Life, I, 36.
49 Humphreys, p. 20.
Perhaps the strong qualities of William Giles's influence helped Dickens to formulate his own ideas of the qualities a master should possess. In fact, Dickens seemed to place more emphasis on a master's personal qualities than on his expertise in the techniques of teaching. Giles certainly could not have been called a Squeers (Nicholas Nickleby) or a Creakle (David Copperfield). Many evenings Giles would visit Dickens, and on Dickens's departure from Chatham, Giles surprised him with a copy of Goldsmith's Bee as a memento of their friendship. Shortly after the publication of the Pickwick Papers, and many years after Dickens had left Barton Hall, Dickens received a silver snuff-box from his old schoolmaster.

John Dickens was transferred back to London during the winter of 1822. His son remained at Chatham until the end of the winter term. Charles, travelling alone, joined his family who was then residing on Bayham Street. Robert Langton suggested that this singular trip to London probably provided the basis for the delightful narrative of David Copperfield's first journey alone. Dickens experienced his first moments of isolation and fear during this interlude without his family. And upon his arrival in London, Dickens found no release for his feelings of loneliness. The family

---

50 Forster, Life, I, 35.
51 Ibid., p. 33.
had succumbed to severe poverty, and one of the younger children had died. For the moment, Dickens's aspirations for more education were thwarted. Dickens described his feelings in *The Haunted House*: "I was taken home, and there was Debt at home, as well as Death, and we had a sale there."

In an effort to satisfy his desire to return to school, Dickens borrowed books from his uncle, Thomas Barrow. He began to write sketches, and he even tried to fill his hours of sadness by working with a small model of a theatre which his cousin had given him. When the family's situation worsened, they moved to Gower Street where Mrs. Dickens opened a school in her home. Although Mrs. Dickens did advertise the opening of her school, there is no evidence that she ever received a single student. Once again Dickens's hopes for school were extirpated. Dickens remembered, too, that often there was not much food for dinner, and finally as the family's condition further deteriorated, John Dickens was arrested. With this blow came the necessity for selling most of the family's possessions, even precious books that Charles carried to the drunken bookseller. The bookseller-pawnbroker, as he had on earlier occasions,

52Langton, p. 66.

asked Charles to conjugate Latin verbs while he was writing the receipt for the books. 54

During the elder Dickens's confinement in Marshalsea Prison, Charles, now twelve, began working at a blacking-factory for six shillings per week. Dickens described his monotonous work in the following statement:

My work was to cover the pots of pasteblacking; first with a piece of oil-paper, and then with a piece of blue paper; to tie them round with a string; and then to clip the paper close and neat, all around, until it looked as smart as a pot of ointment from an apothecary's shop. When a certain number of grosses of pots had attained this pitch of perfection, I was to paste on each a printed label; and then go on again with more pots. 55

Even though Forster in his biography of Dickens and Dickens in his autobiography given to Forster imply that Charles's parents were unconcerned about his education, the senior Dickens did arrange with the manager of the blacking factory, James Lambert, to give Charles some instruction from twelve o'clock to one o'clock each day. But apparently this practice was short-lived. 56

This episode in the blacking-warehouse evidently was the most crucial and impressive experience in Dickens's life. The monotony of his duties was overwhelmingly oppressive to his already sensitive nature. The days he spent at the warehouse were filled with a sense of neglect,

54 Ibid., pp. 43-46.
55 Ibid., p. 52.
56 Ibid.
mental suffering, lonely meals of bread, cheese and beer, and the secret shame he felt over his menial position. Alphonse Daudet, a French writer who shared Dickens's empathy toward the ills of society, described their affinity: "I feel in my heart the love which Dickens felt for the unfortunate and the poor, and for childhoods spent in the wretchedness of large cities." 57

Many young English boys worked harder and endured more than Dickens, but probably the reason he felt this indignity was that this was the first real encounter he had had with unhappiness. It is interesting to note, however, that Dickens did possess much stamina; in fact, he and a friend, Bob Fagin, became so proficient in their jobs that they were positioned near the front windows so that the passers-by could view their work. 58 G. K. Chesterton says of Dickens: "He is a boy whom anybody can hurt, but nobody can kill." 59

The exact time Dickens spent at the blacking-factory cannot be substantiated, but he entered it just prior to his father's committal to Marshalsea in February, 1824, and left shortly after his father's release on May 28 of the same year. Dickens's mother and father had argued about

57 Kitton, p. 16.
58 Forster, Life, I, 82.
the boy's future at the factory; Mrs. Dickens preferred that Charles continue working there, but Mr. Dickens wanted his son removed from the workhouse and situated at a school. Dickens never quite forgave his mother for her part in this quarrel. 60

To school Charles Dickens went. He entered Wellington House Academy and continued there for about two years, or until 1927. Salem House in David Copperfield, Dotheboys Hall in Nicholas Nickleby, and the establishment of Doctor Blimber in Dombey and Son present such a close affinity to Wellington House that there is little doubt that they are the same school. 61

According to Henry Danson, a schoolmate of Charles Dickens, the school (Wellington House) was "most shamefully mismanaged, and the boys made very little progress. The proprietor, Mr. Jones, was a Welshman; a most ignorant fellow, and a mere tyrant, whose chief employment was to scourge the boys." 62 Dickens attended the school only during the day, but the boarders apparently received much harsher treatment; the reason for this difference in severity of punishment was probably due to the fear that the day students might report such treatment to their parents.

60 Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Charles Dickens and Other Victorians (New York, 1925), p. 86.

61 Ibid., pp. 59-61, 87.

62 Forster, Life, I, 100.
Still, one of the students, an Owen Thomas, said of Mr. Jones: he was "always ruling ciphering-books with a bloated mahogany ruler, smiting the palms of offenders with the same diabolical instrument, or caning the boys unmercifully." The curriculum at the school included music and foreign languages, and evidence reveals that Dickens played the flute and won an award for his excellence in Latin. R. Shiers, a tutor at the school, in a letter to T. Wright, provided proof that Dickens did receive a prize in Latin. Dickens showed his appreciation by giving his tutor a copy of the work of Horace. In 1904 this copy appeared at the Dickens Exhibition.

Although the conditions at Wellington House were not ideal, Dickens did regain his enthusiasm and youthful spirits. He enjoyed writing, telling stories, participating in play productions and editing his class paper. He had a fascinating sense of humor; he played pranks on old ladies in the streets; he frolicked during the church service and he loved to keep white mice at the school. So it seems there were brighter moments as well as severe times of discipline at Wellington.

---

63 Ibid., pp. 91-95.

64 W. Matchett, "Dickens at Wellington House Academy," Living Age, CCLXXI (November, 1910), 79-86.


66 Forster, Life, I, 95-100.
Recalling the lighter moments at the school, Matchett said, "let us be fair to Jones." The inscription on Mr. Jones's tombstone in old St. Pancras refers to his many years of teaching as "master of a respectable school in this parish," to "the inflexible integrity of his character," and to his "social and domestic virtues." 67

Dickens, whether intentionally or not, caused much speculation about the prototype for his "Our School," which appeared in Household Words on October 11, 1851. Some scholars believe the description to be that of Giles's school in Chatham; others that of Jones's school in London; and still others believe it may be an imaginary school. As if to confuse further his readers, Dickens in his article, "Our School," tells of visiting the school and finding that a railroad had cut through the school and demolished the school and the playground. Forster's description of Giles's reads: "Nor was it the least of the disappointments of his [Dickens's] visit in after-life to the scenes of his boyhood that he found this play-field had been swallowed up by a railroad station." 68 A cursory reading might indicate that "Our School" definitely was Giles's school. But a schoolmate of Dickens's told Forster that Mr. Jones's house "still stands in its original state, but the school and large

67Matchett, pp. 76-86.

68Forster, Life, I, 32.
playground behind disappeared on the formation of the
London and Northwestern Railway. . . ."69 And even Dickens's
own description of Wellington House Academy leads one to
believe that this is "Our School:" "I went as a day scholar
to Mr. Jones's establishment which was in Mornington Place,
and had its schoolroom sliced away by the Birmingham railway,
when that change came about."70 So, the investigations of
the origin of "Our School" are still inconclusive; the
school could be either Giles's or Jones's.

Dickens's article "Our School" refers to several masters
very much like those at Wellington and those portrayed in
his novels. Of special interest is his narrative on the
inadequately-trained, dull, slow-witted masters of the school.

The master was supposed among us to know nothing, and
one of the ushers was supposed to know everything.
We are still inclined to think the first-named
supposition perfectly correct. . . . The only
branches of education with which he showed the least-
acquaintance were ruling and corporally
punishing.71

Such descriptions appear many times in Dickens's later
writings when he so stringently speaks out for reforms in
education. A close perusal of "Our School" reveals many
similarities to Dickens's early school experiences at both
Giles's and Jones's schools. And even if some details in
the article are fantasy and not faithful pictures of his

69Ibid., p. 76.

70Ibid., p. 91.

71Charles Dickens, "Our School," Household Words, IV
(London, 1852), 81.
own schooldays, they are fairly accurate pictures of schools found in nineteenth-century England. The article is written in light-hearted humor and does not contain the fierce indignation and bitter satire so prevalent in Dickens's novels on schools and school life.

Much attention has been given in this paper to Dickens's early education, his bitter experience at the blacking-warehouse, as well as his writings such as "Our School;" but, at this point it is tantamount that other factors which "mold a man's character, develop his talents, inspire his ideals, and best fit him for life" be studied.72 One of the most important factors in such a study is a person's home and work environment, and its influence upon his ideas and philosophies of adulthood. The insecurity Dickens experienced in his boyhood home and the startling fickleness and snobbery he encountered in his early teenage employment did have a substantial influence upon his later life.73

The precise date of Dickens's departure from Wellington House Academy is not known; however, Robert Langton in his investigations secured evidence to show that Dickens was employed as an office boy with the firm of Ellis and Blackmore from May, 1827, until November, 1828.74 One interesting

72Manning, p. 38.
73Ibid.
74Langton, p. 94.
item is that there is extant, in the Widener Library at Harvard University, a petty cash book which Dickens kept while employed with Ellis and Blackmore; the first entry in the book is dated January 5, 1828. Near this date Dickens secured a copy of Gurney's Brachygraphy, and under the direction of his uncle, John Barrow, a reporter with The Times and the Morning Chronicle, he began a dedicated study of shorthand. By mastering the art of shorthand by the time he ended his tenure at Ellis and Blackmore, Dickens appeared to be following the precedent set by his father.

Dickens's career then was a joint venture of reporting with Tom Carlton, a distant cousin. They shared with one of the proctors the expenses of renting a room in the Consistory Court as a transcribing office. As a free-lance reporter in Doctors' Commons, Dickens was exposed to notable doctors who had exclusive control over "wills, ships, and vestries." In March, 1832, after two years in Doctors' Commons, Dickens joined the staff of the True Sun, as a reporter. About this time he also became a parliamentary reporter for the Mirror of Parliament, edited by John Barrow. Shortly thereafter Dickens was appointed reporter to the Morning Chronicle; he continued in that position until

75Dexter, ed., Letters, II, 42-44.
76Langton, p. 97.
77Dexter, "Charles Dickens: Journalist," Nineteenth Century and After, CKVI (June, 1934), 705-716.
78Ibid., p. 706.
the end of 1836. It was while Dickens was writing for the *Morning Chronicle* that the first of his *Sketches* was published in the *Monthly Magazine*, 1833.

Dickens's letters reveal that after about two years in law offices he became disenchanted and began to devote his energies to becoming a "first-rate parliamentary reporter." Showing his immodesty, he stated that upon the publication of *Pickwick*, he had established a reputation of "being the best and the most rapid reporter ever known." Dickens's experiences in legal offices and courts of law for five years and four more years as a reporter in the parliamentary gallery or on election circuits certainly must have prepared and influenced him for his great forthcoming writing for reform. During these years of reporting, Dickens was associated with such men as "Brougham, Cobbett, Lord John Russell, Sir Robert Peel, Nassae Senior, Lord Grey, Stanley, Gladstone, O'Connell, the Duke of Wellington, Macauley, Bulwer-Lytton, Palmerston, Lord Melbourne, Lord Althorp, and many others."

And in addition to the influence of these great minds, Dickens had the benefit of listening to outstanding debates on the "Reform Bill, the New Poor Law, the abolition of

---


81Langton, p. 108.

slavery, factory reform, the India Act, the Municipal Reform Act, grants-in-aid to education, taxes on newspapers, disturbances in Ireland, and conditions in the Canadas."\(^8\)

This invaluable wealth of knowledge could not have been obtained in a four-year college curriculum.

The numerous books Dickens read as a boy and as a young adult also provided a source of material to be used later in his novels. Among those books found in Dickens's repertoire of readings were Goldsmith's *History of England*; works of Addison; Monboddo's *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*; Goldsmith's *Bee*; Berges's *The Roman Senate*, *The Dance of Death*; Moore's *Lalla Rookh*; Byron's *Don Juan* and his *Childe Harold*; Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*; Belzoni's *Explorations*; Ross's *Voyages*; *The Newgate Calendar*, *State Trials*; and Scott's *Demonology*.

Dickens also had an extraordinary interest in the theatre as evidenced by his make-believe at home, his performances at the Mitre Inn, and his writing and acting of plays at school. As cited by his biographers, Dickens frequented theatres at Covent Garden and Surrey. His love for dramatics was revealed in the theatrical benefits he

\(^8\) Manning, pp. 40-41.

\(^8\) T. W. Hill, "Books that Dickens Read," *The Dickensian*, XLV (March, 1949), 81-90.
gave from 1847 until 1852. Dickens's writings in later life regarding reform certainly reflected this flair for dramatics.

Dickens had other experiences which deeply affected him. Through visits with a friend to the home of the Beadnell family, Dickens met and fell in love with the youngest daughter, Maria. She taunted Dickens by constant flirtations, but when the family learned of Dickens's background, they immediately terminated the affair by sending Maria abroad. Dickens never completely erased the memory of this episode from his mind. As is known, Maria appears as Dora in David Copperfield and as Flora Finshing in Little Dorrit. It is interesting to observe the transition of the portrayals: between David Copperfield and Little Dorrit, she had married and grown stout. Dickens's father, during this period, also contributed to the younger Dickens's problems. John Dickens would flee his creditors, leaving Charles to confront the impatient collectors. Again and again Dickens had to turn to his friends for money to keep his own financial condition solvent. The experience of seeing his love affair dissolved because of snobbery and the family's continuous pecuniary situation made a profound impact on Dickens.

85 Forster, Life, II, 368-402.
Other moulding influences for Dickens were, no doubt, his numerous friends such as Lytton, Chorley, Macready, Mark Lemon, Delane, Forster, Angela Coutts, et al. Also, his visits to America broadened his understanding and appreciation of different educational systems; his trips to France, Italy, and Switzerland provided cultural enrichment.

One cannot say which single incident in Dickens's childhood and early adulthood was the most important motivating factor in his championship for social and educational reforms. But it is significant to recall those events which did have an intense influence upon him. From his mother and aunt, he acquired an appreciation and love for reading; from his father, the enjoyment of elocution and dramatics. His schooldays at Chatham developed his perception of good qualities in a school and its schoolmaster. His lonely journey from Chatham to London left him with an infinite sense of insecurity. He felt rejected by his indigent father and family-obsessed mother. And at Wellington House Academy, Dickens saw the contrast of Giles's friendly, warm, scholarly school with that of Jones's harsh, wretched, demeaning establishment. From Dickens's experiences in the law offices, he learned the delays and inconsistencies of the law, the overbearing insolent and tyrannical methods of authority.

John Barrow's tutorship at Doctors' Commons instilled in Dickens a sense of prudence. His experiences with the Beadnell family taught him the meaning of snobbery and the power of influence of money; it also helped him to recognize feminine fickleness. And through his position in the parliamentary gallery, Dickens developed resourcefulness, resilience and responsibility. From this experience in Parliament, he learned that reforms are more readily achieved by appealing to men's humor, emotions, and imagination, rather than appealing to their intellects.

These advantages and disadvantages greatly affected Dickens's views on education, his writings, and his subsequent efforts toward the improvement of schools and education.

Aside from the influences of Dickens's early personal significant experiences, the most repugnant situations affecting his adulthood were the deplorable conditions of the schools. The schools in England during the nineteenth century can be divided into two main categories: one, the church and charity schools which included the charity schools, the workhouse schools and the monitorial schools; second, private enterprise schools which included the Dame Schools, the common-day schools and the private boarding schools. All of these are often referred to in Dickens's novels.

88 Manning, p. 43.
The charity school encompassed a melange of institutions known as parochial, ward, industrial, workhouse, hospital, free, catechetical, Sunday, and evening schools. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the school founders had hoped that even the very poor would have an opportunity to study. However, their purpose was never to educate all the masses. Churchmen, by the time of Queen Ann’s reign, had ascertained that educating the poor was an effective way to induce them into the church. As a consequence, a group of schools called charity schools were scattered throughout England. Politically, these schools were a means of social control. Usually academic excellence was not encouraged; it was thought that this would encourage the poor to become dissatisfied with their status. Rather than academic courses being offered, the students were instructed in the principles of industry and frugality. The students were also indoctrinated with church ritual in an effort to educate the poor into accepting a status of subordination, i.e., gratitude, obedience, and passivity. The charity school pupils were dressed in uniforms which was a constant reminder to them and the public of their inferior station in life. On Sundays the children were required to sit in a conspicuous area of the church; again they were branded charity children. 89

89 Mary Gwladys Jones, The Charity School Movement (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 1-60.
The curriculum at the charity schools was very limited. Some reading and writing were taught; a small amount of arithmetic was administered to the boys and a little needlework to the girls. Singing was introduced at the beginning of the schools but was soon eliminated because it might lead to the sin of pride. The expense of the schools was very minute; a few benches, slates, and pencils served for equipment, and an old building served as housing. Teachers were hired for twenty pounds a year. Once a year a charity sermon was preached in church; the students were reminded of their benefactors, and the offering for the day was given to the school—an elaborate display of public charity for all to see. 90

Early in the nineteenth century as society became more industrialized, charity schools began incorporating manual training into the curriculum. They became known as schools of industry or workhouse schools. The purpose of these schools was to make the schools self-supporting through selling products of the children's labor. Inevitably, the academic courses were replaced by knitting, sewing, spinning, and straw plaiting for the girls; and cobbling, printing, carpentry, and gardening for the boys. Of course, a few pence of the children's earnings were kept each week to pay for this meagre instruction. 91

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., pp. 154-162.
Such workhouse schools were failures. It was not feasible to operate these schools; the children did not have the mental nor physical dexterity to make production profitable. As a solution to their problems, the workhouse officials "farmed out" the children to farmers, chimney sweeps, undertakers, and almost anyone who would accept the children. With the industrial expansion, the children were solicited to do unbearable work in the factories and mines, as reported by the Children's Employment Commission.92

The rapid industrialization ushered in the apprenticeship schools and Sunday schools. Heretofore, a lengthy period of apprenticeship was a prerequisite to industrial employment. Now, with the rise of the factory system, a long period of apprenticeship seemed unnecessary for unskilled tending of machines. As a result, laborers no longer received training in their master's households.93 Consequently, most workers were ignorant, diseased, overworked, and generally mistreated. The apprenticeship schools met the state requirements by offering one or two hours of instruction each day. But even these meagre attempts at education were not adhered to until the appointment of state inspectors in 1834 to visit the factories periodically.


Although the Sunday schools did not originate with the Industrial Revolution, it did give impetus to the rise of the Sunday schools. Robert Raikes, one of the early advocates of the Sunday schools, believed Sunday instruction would alleviate ignorance and Sunday idleness of the poor. The Bible was the primary source of instruction with some reading, writing, and arithmetic interspersed. As the number of schools increased, classes were offered two or three days a week, in addition to Sunday. Gradually, the schools began to be operated on a daily basis, but when the number of them increased, the people who had advocated their initiation could no longer support them. As a result, the tutorial methods of Joseph Lancaster and Dr. Andrew Bell were implemented. At this point it was estimated that of the six out of ten children attending any school, three attended these nondenominational Sunday classes. 94

In nineteenth-century England many societies formed schools for humanitarian reasons, religious zeal, or denominational rivalry, but the major two societies were the British and the National. Joseph Lancaster in 1798 opened a school for poor children in his home in Southwark. Even though he was a Quaker, he welcomed all the poor children in the area. And in 1803 he published Improvements in Education. Within a few years Lancaster was able to found

the British and Foreign School Society. Lancaster may be said to have promoted non-sectarian education in England. By 1857 the Society had fifteen-hundred schools with a million pupils.

The National Society for the Education of the Poor in The Principles of the Established Church began in 1791 in India under the direction of Dr. Andrew Bell. He initiated the practice of writing in sand with a pointed stick. Some of the older students were appointed as monitors to use this writing as a type of instruction. This method of teaching was expanded to other subjects and eventually the teachers were replaced by monitors. Upon Dr. Bell's return to England in 1797, he, too, published a treatise on education entitled, An Experiment in Education. Some of the prominent Englishmen became alarmed at the "ungodliness" of the Lancaster System. The Established Church was also becoming alarmed at the liberal system of Lancaster. As retaliation, Dr. Bell and other spokesmen for the Church established in 1811 the National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. By 1851 their enrollment was one million pupils in some seventeen thousand schools. In addition to offering instruction in the Bible


as did the Lancaster school, the Bell schools offered practice in the Anglican liturgy. And some schools even made church attendance mandatory.

Both the Bell and the Lancaster schools were operated on the monitorial plan. Sometimes as many as one thousand students were gathered in a large building something like a barn. Benches were arranged in squares either in the middle of the building or along the sides facing the walls. Each group was under the direction of a monitor who conducted the classes quite mechanically in rote.  

Everything in the monitorial school evolved into a system. The classes became as regimented as clockwork. Certain rules and signals were formulated for marching with standardized punishment for those failing to comply with the regulations. At the founding of the school, the tuition was free, but gradually fees were charged to help defray expenses. So, ultimately the charity schools again became the only free schools.

It should be noted that these monitorial schools, at least in theory, were similar to those advocated by Dickens—humane institutions. However, in reality an elaborate awards and punishment system was practiced, a system that evokes

---

97 Education Commission, Parliamentary Papers, IV (London, 1818), iii, 56.

98 Ibid., IV, 1816, 26-34, 158, 238.
mixed emotions today. There were parades to commend the outstanding students, medals were awarded, and placards were worn as proof of merit; however, often the placards were not symbols of excellence, but acknowledgments of derogatory actions. At Salem House in David Copperfield, for example, David was required to wear a placard which said, "Take care of him. He bites." Many children at the monitorial schools were forced to wear dunce's caps, have wooden logs tied to their backs or legs, be shackled, yoked together, or walk backwards. This debasement even included such instances as a girl washing a boy's face in the audience of the entire school, and at the same time the girl was instructed to administer a few solid slaps across the boy's cheeks.

Lancaster and Bell both desired schools full of sympathy for the poor and needy. Lancaster attempted to train pupils in moral habits appropriate to the welfare of society, and Bell was interested in instilling in the students habits that would cause them to be good Anglicans, good subjects, and good Christians. Sadly though, the monitorial schools did not improve the conditions of the students; in fact, they dishonored the meaning of education. Instruction was

99 Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (Chicago, 1951), p. 49.

reduced to mechanized memory work; standards were very low because the monitors were boys only ten years of age who could give very little intellectual training to the students.101 There were other societies besides the British and National, but the descriptions of Lancaster and Bell monitorial schools, and the workhouse and charity schools are sufficient for one to understand the types of schools that were described in Dickens's novels and short stories.102

Interestingly, Dickens's first novel, Sketches by Boz treats the schoolmaster in "Our Parish" with tolerance and kindness. There is none of the satire that appears in his later novels. The old pauper schoolmaster is a rather pathetic, wizened figure who, having suffered much misfortune, still diligently carries out his duties of schoolmaster in a workhouse. The light humor in this work of 1836 is quite comparable to that of "Our School" written in 1851. Dickens's novels that struck out so vehemently against the social and educational inequities were written in the interval of these two light, compassionate works. Dickens indicated in "Our Parish" that he realized the common practice was to give a little instruction to the children in the workhouses, and

101 Ibid.

also to require them to work in order to defray the expenses of their education and maintenance. In *Oliver Twist*, however, Dickens made only a slight reference to this fact.

"Well! you have come here to be educated, and taught a useful trade," said the red-faced gentleman in the high chair.

'So you'll begin to pick oakum to-morrow morning at six o'clock,' added the surly one in the white waistcoat.  

Further insight into Oliver Twist's struggles will be given later in the section on Dickens's theories of education.

The British and National Society schools, though far from ideal schools, were supervised by public-spirited men who, regardless of their prejudices, were well-educated citizens. And the schools were partially subsidized by government funds. But none of these conditions existed for the private schools. Some of the private schools were adequately administered, but most of the schools were run either by well-meaning but uneducated and untrained individuals trying to make a few pounds, or by avaricious scoundrels trying to exploit children.  

One of the most common type private schools was the Dame School, attended by the youngest children of the very poor. The advent of the Industrial Revolution had compelled


parents to work at the factories and mills thus eliminating all home care or instruction of children. The term "dame school" originated from the fact that the schools were taught by some "thrifty dame eager to turn a penny by teaching while at the same time engaged in spinning or in some other convenient household occupation." 105 Many of the dame schools were run by incompetent, senile, old women such as Miss Wopsle in Great Expectations. Of course, women teachers had long been considered even less competent than men. The charity school discussed earlier had required that the men have some aptitude for teaching and some rudiments of learning, but the qualifications for mistresses excluded "that part which relates to the writing a good hand, and understanding arithmetic." 106 There were some two hundred thirty dame schools in Manchester alone. Often the masters of the dame schools were blind and, consequently, taught their students with great simplicity. The blind master frequently was interrupted from his duties to turn his wife's mangle, but probably the already poor lessons were not affected by the interruption. If the child was less fortunate, he was sent to a dame school that was a dirty, close room where the boys and girls were sent not to learn but to free

105 Brubacher, p. 386.

their families of the burden for caring for them. The dames felt their only obligation to the children was to keep them quiet and out of trouble. The schools were extremely crowded, which made the sanitation problems even more acute. The parents paid a fee of about threepence or fourpence a week for each child. The schools were usually conducted in a small room of a house, often damp and filthy. The poverty-stricken dames frequently fell asleep or "went out washing," leaving a neighbor in charge of the students. Instruction, if any was administered, usually was limited to learning the alphabet, the numbers, and the Lord's Prayer. Occasionally, a child would overcome the obstacles of the school and progress to rudimentary spelling and reading.\footnote{Andrew White Tuer, \textit{History of the Hornbook} (London, 1896), p. 6.}

The older children of the poor attended a private school known as "the common day-school," usually administered by men. The fee for these students was about sixpence a week. Here, as in the dame schools, the masters were generally dissolute, ignorant, and brutal persons. In addition to the curriculum taught at the dame schools, a little writing and arithmetic were taught. Some schools offered extra subjects such as penmanship, geography, and grammar.\footnote{Hammond, p. 141.}
Official records of the mid-nineteenth century showed that the deplorable conditions continued in the private schools until the state intervened in 1861. A Royal Commission of Inquiry, set up under the Duke of Newcastle, exposed the squalid conditions and dissolute teachers in both London and the suburban areas. The report described the teachers:

None are too old, too poor, too ignorant, too feeble, too sickly, too unqualified in any or every way, to regard themselves, and to be regarded by others, as unfit for school-keeping. Nay, there are few, if any occupations regarded as incompatible with school-keeping, if not as simultaneous, at least preparatory employments. Domestic servants out of place, discharged bar-maids, vendors of toys or lollipops, keepers of small eating-houses, of mangles, or of small lodging-houses, needlewomen, who take in plain or slop work; milliners; consumptive patients in an advanced stage; cripples almost bed-ridden; persons of at least doubtful temperance; outdoor paupers; men and women of 70 or 80 years of age; persons who spell badly, who can hardly write, and who cannot cipher at all.\textsuperscript{109}

All of the schools mentioned in this paper seemed to have influenced Dickens's theories of education. From his copious writings, Dickens appears to have been most adamant about the conditions in the private schools. Several of his novels incorporate episodes from charity, workhouse, and monitory schools, but the brunt of his anger was directed toward the private schools.

\textsuperscript{109}Education Commission, \textit{Parliamentary Papers}, XXI (London, 1861), 29, 93, 94.
Sufficient information has been presented to show that Dickens's becoming a champion for the poor and uneducated cannot be attributed to any one factor. He was greatly influenced by his loneliness as a child at home, in school, and in the blacking-factory. And as an adult he became very sensitive and responsive to the mistreatment of the children in the factories and in the schools. The following section on Dickens's theories of education will reflect all the factors studied earlier in this paper.

Dickens's Theories on Education

Charles Dickens's theories on education cannot be formulated and listed in a certain order. Rather, one ascertains Dickens's belief in improvement of education by studying his novels, his articles, and his speeches. Dickens believed that change can best be effected through light, compassionate humor, rather than didactic sermonizing, and to this purpose he devoted his life. Dickens wrote to the Reverend Thomas Robinson: "while you teach in your walk of life the lessons of tenderness you have learned in sorrow... I will pursue cruelty and oppression... so long as I have the energy of thought and the power of giving it utterance."\textsuperscript{110}

Some sociologists have criticized Dickens for his unrealistic approach to the problems of charity and education. Even though he reported such reforms as the Reform Bill of 1833,

\textsuperscript{110} Dexter, ed., \textit{Letters}, I, 314.
the Abolition of Slavery, 1833, and the Poor Law Reform of 1834, and the Municipal Act of 1835, Dickens did not seem to realize that the schools could not be completely reformed by church, state, or benevolent charity alone; he did not analyze the complex social conditions that had been precipitated by the Industrial Revolution. Conditions in England were changing so rapidly during the nineteenth century that sympathy for reform just simply was not enough. One critic even said that Dickens believed that social conditions could be transformed by indiscriminate benevolence in which life would be like Christmas all year. This criticism seems much too harsh. Dickens's sympathy for the poor was very real and sincere, even though he may not have considered the complexities of the socio-economic conditions of the day. Because he loved the children he created in his books as he loved real children, his child characters made a poignant appeal to his readers.

Dickens's descriptions of the schools of nineteenth-century England were drab and wretched. But he did not distort the picture of the schools at all; he did not describe the schools as beautiful because they were not beautiful. He wrote about the sordid side of life and the terrible, ugly, despicable living conditions of the poor. Dickens's purpose was genuine, and his details were accurate as in the scene

111W. A. Sibbald, "Dickens Revisited," *Living Age*, CCLII (March, 1907), 524-534.
of little Oliver Twist asking Mr. Bumble for more food:

'Please sir, I want some more.' The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed in stupified astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds; and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralyzed with wonder; the boys with fear. 'What!' said the master at length, in a faint voice. 'Please sir,' replied Oliver, 'I want some more.' The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle; pinioned him in his arms; and shrieked aloud for the beadle.\textsuperscript{112}

Dickens presented the facts as he saw them. The picture is quite vivid; one can almost see the obese, sanguine scoundrel as the small child momentarily dissolves the master's armor of gruffness. For just an instant, Oliver has the upper hand of the situation, and the other boys are relishing the unique scene. Oliver, of course, was placed in confinement for this simple episode. Dickens through this incident showed how students were not permitted the luxury of thinking, and especially never the privilege of voicing one's feelings. Being offered to anyone for five pounds, Oliver was apprenticed to a villainous master as a chimney sweeper. Dickens again shows his disgust at the inadequacy of the law and education by using satire:

'Well,' said the old gentleman, 'I suppose he's fond of chimney sweeping?'

'He dotes on it, your worship,' replied Bumble: giving Oliver a sly pinch to intimate that he had better not say he didn't.

\textsuperscript{112} Dickens, \textit{Oliver Twist}, pp. 13-15.
'And he will be a sweep, will he?' inquired the old gentleman.
'If we was to bind him to any other trade tomorrow, he'd run away simultaneous, your worship,' replied Bumble.¹¹³

Literary and educational historians alike have responded to Dickens's using ludicrous situations to make the public aware of the depravity of the children's situation. Stephen Leacock called Dickens's style "comic-relief."¹¹⁴ Perhaps it is the little touches of satire and comedy that have insured that this novel, along with Dickens's other novels, has not deteriorated into mere sentimentality and emotion. And it is this detail that lifts Oliver out of the nineteenth century and makes him timeless.

Mr. Dombey of Dombey and Son did not believe in general education, but he did approve of the charity schools so that the inferior classes would be taught to know their position and to conduct themselves properly.¹¹⁵ Dickens strongly protested the wearing of uniforms at schools as being an overt stamp of poverty. In this novel he makes this belief quite apparent by having the students wear blue baize tailored coats and caps with orange binding and red worsted stockings. Dickens's repulsion at the incompetency

¹¹³Ibid., pp. 23-24.


¹¹⁵Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (Chicago, 1885), p. 64.
of teachers is revealed in this novel as he describes Mr. Grinder:

a superannuated Old Grinder of a savage disposition who had been appointed schoolmaster because he didn't know anything and wasn't fit for anything, and for whose cruel games all chubby little boys had a perfect fascination.  

The practice of imbuing charity pupils with Scripture verses and humiliating them by parading them at church in order to indoctrinate in them a sense of inferiority and passivity was abhorred by Dickens. He shows his ridicule:

Rob the Grinder, whose reverence for the inspired writings, under the admirable existence of the Grinders' school, had been developed by a perpetual bruising of his intellectual shins against all the proper names of all the tribes of Judah, and by the monotonous repetition of hard verses, especially by way of punishment, and by the parading of him at six years old in leather breeches, three times a Sunday, very high up, in a very hot church, with a great organ buzzing against his drowsy head, like an exceedingly busy bee--Rob the Grinder made a mighty show of being edified when the Captain ceased to read, and generally yawned and nodded while the reading was in progress.

Dickens believed that such mandatory indignities did not improve a student, but only contributed to his becoming a dejected and unsuccessful adult.

Dickens's ideas of education were given in speeches as well as in his novels. In a speech some ten years after Dombey and Son he said he didn't like schools whose pupils

116 Ibid., p. 73.
117 Ibid., p. 114.
"in leather breeches and with mortified straw hats for bonnets were forced to file along the streets in long melancholy rows under the escort of that surprising British monster—a beadle."\textsuperscript{118}

Many reviewers praised Dickens for his remarks in \textit{Dombey and Son}. One such critic states, "He should be immortalized, if only for his putting down school tyrannies, exposing and crushing school pretensions, and doubtless saving many a fair intellect from withering blight and perversion."\textsuperscript{119}

Dickens's theories of education are quite vividly revealed in his descriptions of the private boarding schools in England. Dotheboys Hall in \textit{Nicholas Nickleby} was a school to which unwanted boys were sent to get them out of the way of their parents. The two-hundred-mile distance from London prevented students from visiting parents or reporting to them the deplorable conditions that existed. "These schools were a diabolical convenience for callous parents, guardians, and brutal exploiters of defenseless youth."\textsuperscript{120} Wackford Squeers, the infamous master at Dotheboys Hall, is considered one of the most immortal creations in English fiction. And his institution was


\textsuperscript{119}"A Few Words about Novels--a Dialogue in a Letter to Eusebius," \textit{Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine}, LXIV (July, 1848), 469.

\textsuperscript{120}E. Hardy, "Yorkshire Schools," \textit{Living Age}, CCLXIX (April, 1911), 218-220.
symbolic of the worst of institutions where children were maltreated, starved, and unmercifully punished. Nicholas Nickleby described his first sight of the classroom full of stunted, contemptible, hopeless, vicious boys:

... with every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, and every revengeful passion that can fester in swollen hearts eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient Hell was breeding here!\(^{121}\)

And yet the scene, painful as it was, had its grotesque features, which, in a less interested observer than Nicholas, might have provoked a smile.

The conditions at the school were no better than Nicholas's first impression. The boys were fed brimstone and treacle and Squeers flogged the poor students as he perused certain alleged letters from their parents.\(^ {122}\)

The similarity of the details of the Dotheboys Hall and those of other Yorkshire schools such as Bowes Hall, John Smith's school, and Wodencroft Lodge are apparent to the casual reader. Dickens's purpose in writing this novel appears to have been to expose the vile practice of banishing unwanted boys to inhuman Yorkshire schools. The reading public began to question the horrible pictures of the schools Dickens presented in his novels.\(^ {123}\)

\(^{121}\)Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, pp. 97-98.
\(^{122}\)Ibid., p. 177.
Dickens's next novel about boarding-houses was *David Copperfield*. Here Dickens revealed his ideas of education by including schools of drastic contrast: Salem House and Dr. Strong's School. Mr. Creakle, the master of Salem House, was described as a simple, ignorant and mean, little-voiced man. He had become a teacher only after becoming bankrupt in business. David had said upon entering the school:

I gazed upon the school room into which he took me, as the most forlorn and desolate place I had ever seen. I see it now. A long room, with three long rows of desks, and six of forms, and bristling all round with pegs for hats and slates. Scraps of old copy-books lay on the floor. Some silkworms' houses, made of the same materials, are scattered over the desks. Two miserable little white mice, left behind by their owner, are running up and down in a dusty castle made of pasteboard and wire, looking in all the corners with their red eyes for anything to eat. A bird in a cage happened about that was little bigger than himself, but he was not singing. . . . There was an unwholesome smell upon the room. Ink was splashed everywhere.  

And David had no better impression of the actual instruction at the school.

Mr. Creakle was indeed the tartar he claimed to be. He whipped the boys with his cane every day of his life. In truth, he did not know how to do anything else. He was duller than the lowest boy in the school. . . . He took delight in punishing. If a boy made a mistake in a lesson or if he grew sleepy and nodded over his book, down came that cane upon his back.  

---

124 Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 49.

125 Ibid., pp. 57-58.
The second school attended by David Copperfield, Dr. Strong's School, was one of the few schools Dickens complimented.

Doctor Strong's was an excellent school; as different from Mr. Creakle's as good is from evil. It was very gravely and decorously ordered, and on a sound system; with an appeal, in everything, to the honour and good faith of the boys, and an avowed intention to rely on their possession of those qualities unless they proved themselves unworthy of it, which worked wonders. We all felt that we had a part in the management of the place, and in sustaining its character and dignity. Hence, we soon became warmly attached to it—I am sure I did for one, and I never knew, in all my time, of any other boy being otherwise—and learnt with good will, desiring to do it credit. We had noble games out of hours, and plenty of liberty; but even then, I remember, we were well spoken of in the town, and rarely did any disgrace, by our appearance or manner, to the reputation of Doctor Strong and Dr. Strong's boys. 126

Even though Dickens's descriptions of the schools in his novels are quite accurate, it does not necessarily mean that all schools in England were reprehensible. For example, the private school of Reverend Robert Dawes at "Kings' Somborne with its library, object lessons and adult evening classes, was considered the best in the land." 127

After discussing Dickens's novels in which he expressed his ideas of education through specific schools, it is timely for one to study Dickens's general philosophy of education.

Charles Dickens believed, as did Friedrich Froebel, that the purpose of education was to bring out "the divinity in children, and to bring into children from without the

---

126 Ibid., pp. 139-140.

divinity found in nature, thus achieving a unity. If God was in man, it followed that children were fundamentally good, not evil; hence self-expression was encouraged through such media as song, language, drawing, music, and gesture. . . ."\textsuperscript{128} It followed then that if God was in nature, nature should be studied to reveal itself to children; thus the necessity for experimentation and physical activities. A child learns by doing; he should have the opportunity for more games and play, music and song and milder methods of discipline.\textsuperscript{129}

Dickens's two Christmas stories, "Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings," 1863, and "Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy," 1864, are examples of his philosophy as discussed above. Mr. Lirriper was a warm-hearted lodging-house keeper. A lodger, a young un-wed mother died shortly after the birth of a baby boy. Mrs. Lirriper and a male lodger, Major Jackman, adopted the child and decided they must "cultivate" the child's mind "on a principle that will make it a delight." In the story Dickens had the child learn mathematics by counting one object at a time, then in sets of two, three and so on, but not to exceed five objects. Finally, the child was required to count the objects orally. As the child progressed, his training included counting and association of more difficult


\textsuperscript{129}Ibid.
objects, but always the emphasis was on the child.  

Dickens believed that children are born with a fundamental goodness of heart. In The Old Curiosity Shop, for example, Kit remarks to his mother:

If I was to see your good-humoured face that has always made home cheerful, turned into a grievous one, and the baby trained to look grievous too, and to call itself a young sinner (bless its heart) and a child of the devil (which is calling its dead father names); if I was to see this... I should go and 'list for a soldier, and run my head on purpose against the first cannon ball I saw coming my way.'

Dickens's believing in the goodness of children attacked the schools, the administration, the teachers and the public because of their apathy. In Dombey and Son, he spoke out against the "hot-house" system of forcing children to memorize aggregates of heterogeneous knowledge. And in Hard Times he introduced the state inspectors of schools and ridiculed an administrative system which subjected children to monotonous memorization. The book is saturated with facts and more facts being "choked down the children's throats without any draught of imagination to wash them down." Dickens in Hard Times appeared to have lost his hilarious ridicule, which he never really regained.

---


132 Dickens, Dombey and Son, pp. 170-179.

His descriptions of Mr. M'Choakumchild's School is satirical; they are not funny or amusing, just extremely bitter. The master constantly reiterated that he taught facts, facts, and only facts. He felt nothing else would be of use to the children. The primary purpose of the school was the storing of the mind with facts. This system is what Dickens so violently disagreed with and spoke out against. Dickens said such a system would not enable a child to develop his personality and live a happy and useful life in a complex society.

In *Bleak House*, Dickens was just as outspoken as in *Hard Times* about the neglect of the state in rendering assistance to the schools. Jo, the crossing-sweeper, is told by a constable to move on; then the little boy asks where he should go; the constable is nonplussed. When the same question was brought up in court, the court had no answer either.

Dickens envisioned a way for the state to intervene in the educational system. In fact, he was one of the first advocates of national systems of schools. He summarized the state's disregard for education in one sentence: "Of the monstrous neglect of education in England and the disregard

---

of it by the state as a means of forming good or bad citizens, and miserable or happy men, private schools long afforded a notable example."

But when Dickens solicited state intervention for the schools, he made it clear that he did not want the education dominated by any religious group. It must be noted that even though the government's policy on education was one of laissez-faire, this was the dominant economic and political theory of the day. But in defense of the government, the very year that Nicholas Nickleby was completed, 1839, the Committee of the Privy Council on Education was established.

Dickens in his speeches spoke out for state intervention, public empathy, and general awareness of the intolerable conditions of children and their education. There is no disparity between the educational theory and practices condemned in Dickens's speeches and those condemned in his novels and articles. His orations included disapproval of schools where "the bright childish imagination is utterly discouraged, and where bright childish faces... are gloomily and grimly scared out of countenance; where I have never seen among the pupils, whether boys or girls, anything but little parrots and small calculating machines." 140


139 Smith, pp. 228-257.

140 Shepherd, pp. 181-184.
Dickens promoted religious (but not sectarian) instruction and a homelike atmosphere—a school was to be like a home. All of Dickens's speeches and novels stressed human sympathy, imagination, dignity, and sense of fun; but it is unfortunate that pedagogical critics who were searching for abstruse educational principles have missed these very important elements of Dickens's philosophy.

Other theories of Dickens suggested that self-education gave a man (1) self-respect, (2) strength in adversity and companionship in his work, (3) ability to achieve kindness and tolerance, and (4) ability to accept responsibility in his daily life.

These theories of education cannot be considered pedagogical. As stated earlier, Dickens gave little consideration to the English grammar or public schools. His main concern was with the private schools. Dickens's contribution to educational endeavors was emotional rather than intellectual. There was little analytical sagacity in his discussions. He gave no concrete solutions other than benevolent charity. Dickens believed as Shelley did that emotion is the impetus to action and the motivating force of the will.

142 Shepherd, pp. 74-81.
143 Manning, p. 204.
More important, Dickens presented the children's point of view to adults. He demanded that children have their rightful place in school systems. "He put children first; appealed for a happy school life; pleaded for the development of their imagination, care of their health, kind treatment of their feelings, and encouraged confidence in their essential right to live as children."\textsuperscript{144} He considered children to be the pivotal point in any school system. He fervently desired to bring happiness into the lives of children, especially their schooldays. Dickens advocated a new spirit of instruction that would recognize a child's point of view, and be aware of the depth of humiliation a child experiences, imagination and emotional feeling. One answer to these suggestions would be the selection of high calibre, carefully selected and adequately trained teachers.\textsuperscript{145}

Perhaps the greatest contribution Dickens made to education was his aid in the formation of public awareness through his literary genius. The educational conditions in the nineteenth century allowed abuse of children, starvation, saturated minds with useless facts, crushed imaginations which left them to grow up in the gutters. Dickens demanded an end to these conditions; he did not have the expertise to effect these changes, but the humorous

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., pp. 205-209.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
episodes in his novels, short stories, speeches, articles, and letters helped to mold the public opinion toward that end.146

146 Ibid.
CHAPTER III

JOHN HOLT, CHAMPION OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

John Holt, an educator, writer, and lecturer, began his fight for freedom in the classroom in 1949. While Holt has been a forerunner in the endeavor for a freer, more individualized approach to education, he certainly has not been alone in this struggle. Herbert Kohl, Jonathan Kozol, A. S. Neill, James Herndon, Robert Coles, and Charles Silberman all have advocated abrogation of the conventional school with its lack of emphasis on the individual student and his needs.

Like Dickens in nineteenth-century England, Holt in twentieth-century America has been influenced by the existing economic conditions of the country. This portion of the paper will study these economic conditions as well as Holt’s theories of how children fail and how children learn.

Conditions in America During the Twentieth Century

John Holt outlines the complex problems encountered by children in the twentieth century in his book Freedom and Beyond. He states that school reforms are no longer the
panacea for the many inequities in the present educational institutions. Holt believes that children are educated much more by the society surrounding them and the general quality of life in it than they are by their experiences in the schools. The dream of virtue being preserved in the schools is no longer practicable, nor even possible. It might have worked in the middle ages, but not in a world of cars, jets, television, and mass media. One needs only to look at a review of events during a recent year to understand the complexities confronting American society. *Time* magazine listed the following captions under "The Year in Pictures:"

Police Carrying Body from Rose's Sandwich Shop [Chicago]
Welcome Home for a P.O.W.
Starving Mother and Child in Mali
Keening for a Belfast Strife Victim
Daniel Ellsberg on Trial
Lyndon Baines Johnson Dies
Watergate Committee and Staff Huddle with Chairman Ervin
Rock Celebrators at Watkins Glen
H. R. Haldeman Confers with Attorney
Soldiers Carry Dead Villagers in Cambodia
Sadat and Kissinger in Cairo
Arab Terrorists Hijack Jet in Rome
Gerald Ford becomes Vice President
Egyptian and Israeli Generals Meet in Truce
The Fuel Shortage Hits Home

From these divergent world events, one quickly realizes that America, unlike nineteenth-century England, is no longer an isolated country, but a country whose whole economy is based upon the current world situation.

---


William J. McGill, columnist, stated that "society and many of its institutions are under powerful pressure. We are sometimes nearly surrounded by conflict and paranoid mistrust."3 And Alistair Cooke, historian, columnist, and economist, wrote an epitaph about America in the twentieth century. He said the jazz age was wicked and monstrous and silly, but unfortunately most everyone had a good time. There seemed to be a rearguard protest from some of the critics who kept pointing out the many mushrooming talents in American literature: Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O'Neill, Ernest Hemingway, James T. Farrell, Theodore Dreiser, and Henry Mencken. Cooke added that there had always been "at the gin-mill level, the aging young jazz hounds who said the 1920's were the golden age of American jazz. But whatever virtue we tried to find in the twenties was always a resurrection job. We had always to dig it up and dust it off and say, 'look, it's pretty good isn't it?'"4 He compares this period to the present by noting that not in the last forty years has he seen "anything like the distrust and cynicism that Americans now feel. . . . And in their shock and


bewilderment they are wondering what in God's name is going to happen to America." The thirties, noted Cooke, was a period when the country and its people were struggling to come to grips with the depression. It was also a period of isolation. America was little concerned with the affairs of foreign powers. But Pearl Harbor ended this isolationism in America and signaled the beginning of America as a superpower. This position brought great prosperity and problems, but none seems to compare to those experienced in the Nixon era. From the degradation of the Nixon administration, Cooke hopes America has learned a lesson that will prevent future administrations from getting embroiled in such corruption and scandal.6

Other economists have described America in the twentieth century as being a product of the Industrial Revolution. Professor John Hicks remarked, "One cannot repress the thought that perhaps the whole Industrial Revolution of the last two hundred years has been nothing else but a vast secular boom."7 C. Day Lewis says that the apologists of modern capitalism

5George Michaelson, "An Interview with Alistair Cooke: Britain's 'Mr. America' Tells it Like it is," Fort Worth Star Telegram Parade (March 3, 1974), p. 6.

6Ibid., p. 8.

have lost their confidence. The best doctrine that can be offered is the acceptance of the lesser evil. He adds, "To defend the bad against the worse" is no inspiration to our youth. "The revolt of the generation growing up in the middle and late twentieth century is largely a rejection of the scale of values that is embodied in accepted orthodoxy." 8

William J. McGill sees America's moral crisis as one of critical importance because it deals with spiritual and philosophical foundations. 9 Charles A. Reich asks what kind of life does man live in this moral crisis. He answers, "It is a robot life, in which man is deprived of his own being, and he becomes instead a mere role, occupation, or function. The self within him is killed and he walks through the remainder of his days mindless and lifeless, the inmate and instrument of a machine world." 10

Not only is man becoming a robot in society, but the schools are intensely concerned with training students to stop thinking and start obeying. They are taught to accept authority without question, to respect authority simply for its position, not only in the area of regulations, but in the areas of facts and ideas as well. Everything that happens in the classroom is decided by someone other than the students. Charles Reich sees the schools as no longer

8Ibid., p. 8.
9McGill, p. 11
10Reich, p. 129.
teaching, but indoctrinating students, remolding their thinking. The purpose of this practice is to compel the students to accept someone else's ideas, someone else's version of facts. Reich further believes that schools of the twentieth century are trying to force-feed an entire set of values and attitudes about business, advertising, competition, success, and the American way of life. He adds that to force on the students such attitudes is to promote dishonesty and hypocrisy. Reich even states that "no one will admit that America might be a bad country, that the textbooks might be boring and stupid, that much of what the school does may not be in the best interest of students, that there could be other ways of doing what routine requires."

Reich is in error in suggesting that no one will admit that education is not fulfilling its responsibility to students and recognizing that there might be better approaches to teaching in the schools. John Holt is attempting, quite successfully, to enlighten educators and society in general about the vast inequities of the present educational system.

John Holt's Theories on Education
How Children Fail

John Holt has been teaching and observing children for twenty-two years. He was born in New York City, graduated

11 Ibid., p. 133.
from Yale, but considers Boston his hometown. His experiences have included teaching fifth grade; experimental mathematics at all elementary school levels; beginning reading; and English, French, and mathematics in high school. Holt has lectured on education at Harvard Graduate School of Education and has taught composition to prospective teachers at the University of California at Berkeley. In addition, he has coached soccer and other sports. More recently, Holt has been a consultant with the Fayerweather Street School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. His first two books, *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn*, have become two of the most influential and widely read books on education published within the last twenty-five years. 12

Holt's experiences and experiments in education make him somewhat of an authority on the inequities of the schools. Charles H. Wilson commends Holt: "John Holt writes not only with the authority of a well-educated and experienced teacher, but with a warm personal understanding of the learning process." 13 Holt establishes that children fail because they are afraid, bored, and confused. They are afraid of failing, of disappointing or displeasing the adults around them.

---


"They are bored because the things they are given to do in school are so trivial, so dull, and make such limited and narrow demands on the wide spectrum of their intelligence, capabilities, and talents."¹⁴ Holt notes that society asks the schools to provide three things for its children: "to pass on the traditions and higher values of our own cultures, to acquaint the child with the world in which he lives, and to prepare the child for employment, and if possible, success." Traditionally, these tasks have been done by society, the community itself. None of them has been done well by the school. In fact, Holt states, the schools should not have this sole responsibility. One reason the schools are in trouble is that they are attempting to fulfill too many functions that are not properly theirs. Schools should be a resource, where children go to discover and develop the skills they want to develop. Holt thinks the child, as the adult, should be free "to choose, to find, to make his own road to education." It is society's and the school's responsibility to provide this freedom.¹⁵

Many educators have stated that the schools are innocent victims of the troubles and divisions of society. Holt suspects that rather than the schools being victims of these


¹⁵Holt, The Underachieving School, p. 4.
conditions, they are the chief causes of them. George
dennison in The Lives of Children gives his opinion
regarding this fault of the schools. He thinks even the
more enlightened and human educational experts have done
very little good. He says:

What is the social action of jargon? I have said
that true communication is communion and change.
Jargon is not innocent. The man who speaks it,
who prates in front of us of roles and reciprocally
operative groups, and evaluative maps, and the aims
of the curriculum, and better fits, and superordinate
and subordinate persons means to hold us at a
distance; he means to preserve his specialty--his
little piece of an essentially indivisible whole--
precisely as a specialty. He does not mean to draw
near to us, or to empower us, but to stand over us
and manipulate us. He wishes, in short, to remain
an Expert.16

One fault of the schools is that the instructors and
teachers have made themselves into experts instead of
philosophers. They have destroyed, for most students, their
vital sense that the world, human life, human experience,
is a whole, and everywhere open to them. They have taken
the great property of human knowledge and experience, which
ought to belong to each student, and made it into private
property. "Human experience, knowledge, culture is every-
one's. No one deserves it or has a right to it." Holt sees
this as a fault, a moral error, so great that it might better
be called a sin or a crime. The learned say to the less
learned, "we know more than you, therefore we are better
than you, we have the right to tell you what to do, you have
no right to question us or argue with us, in fact, you have

no right to any serious opinions at all." Holt notes that examples of this philosophy can be found everywhere in our schools. 17 Even the assignments given to students have an air of arrogance about them, as if the information should be extended only to the elite. Following is an example of this type of assignment:

Write a paper upon some aspect of Shakespeare's dramatic technique utilizing two or three plays. The paper should be 5-8 pages, typed on bond paper. It must use correct footnote and bibliography forms.

For this paper you will study the plays as compositions, analyzing any one of the ways Shakespeare uses to make each aspect of his composition successful. Some of the elements of dramatic composition you could consider would be: verse; characterization; kinds of action; uses of theme; uses of the stage and/or stage effects; decorum; kinds of dramatic structures; ways of revealing the central values of the ultimate force in the play's universe.

The objective of the assignment is to give you a chance to examine the plays as artistically composed structures. The great plays are not great because of their stories, people, or ideas. They are great because their elements are brilliantly chosen and shaped as well as efficiently utilized. Their greatness is clear only when one sees how these less extensive patterns work, and then sees how they work together in a play to create a single all-inclusive pattern.

This is not an easy assignment. But when you complete it you can be fully aware, in at least one specific and concrete way, why some of these plays are as awesome as they are. 18

17 Ibid., p. 88.
18 Ibid., pp. 89-90.
Another example of an arrogance and contempt: I would like to make one thing absolutely clear: Shoddy essays mirroring shoddy thought will not obtain a passing degree.

Essays should not be written in a way that avoids all study and effort, and, superficially, gives the impression of personal conclusions as arrived 'after careful consideration of underlying facts.'

Essays have to account for facts. Essays have to state generally accepted ideas about facts. Essays can state personal opinions or personal conclusions which do not conform with generally held views as long as some logically ordered reasoning has been added that warrants deviation in opinion or judgment of the writer of the essay concerned. 19

And finally, an English teacher in his assignments shows how they are strictly to fulfill his desires and not those of the students:

For each assigned book you must turn in a statement of thesis for each chapter or section of each book. All thesis statements should begin, 'The thesis of chapter--is. . . .'

As I expect you to be in class, I also expect you to participate in class discussion. My teaching method is to get at important aspects of the subject matter through discussion. I expect you to contribute; if you don't there are penalties involved. . . . 20

Holt sees such teaching tactics in all levels of education--elementary through college--as destroying the identity of children, their sense of their own self, of their dignity, competence, and worth. Writing does need

19 Ibid., p. 91.
20 Ibid., p. 92.
to be encouraged in the schools, but it cannot be accepted by students in any of the manners suggested in the above assignments. Holt suggests that students are plagued with two types of bad writing today. First, bad writing is encouraged by promoters, advertising and public relations men, the image makers, the propagandists, and worst of all, the politicians. This type writing is bad because it exploits and manipulates the mind. It does not help the reader to know and do what he needs and wants; but only to make him do and think what the writer wants. The second type of bad writing is that which does not seem directed at the student at all; rather, it is the type of writing that is above the reader's head. The writing is for display, to show something about the writer, how learned he is, how clever, how wise he is. George Dennison explains that writers like this do not mean to empower people but to hold their readers at a distance, "to stand over us and manipulate us." 21

Holt says what the schools need is good writing, the kind that makes students awake, aware, informed, and confident; a kind of writing that helps one to know himself. The schools are failing to meet this need. What the schools are doing is conveying to children that words, talk, and

21 Ibid., p. 174.
writing are not expressions and extensions of oneself, but things that one uses to influence, to manipulate, to get things out of other people. Children are not even given an opportunity to experiment with language. The teachers say, "You may not talk (or write) except when we tell you, and then only about what we want you to talk about, and in the way we want you to talk about it. All other talk and ways of talking are illegal, to be repressed and punished."  

Not only are children discouraged in expressing themselves in their writing; they are judged in all their endeavors. They are told to sit still, be quiet, courteous, and do what they are told to do when they are told to do it. Such treatment transmits the following message to the students: "You're worthless. You can't be trusted. You're incompetent to do anything. You've got to let other people manage your life for you or you'll make a terrible mess of it" Holt even sees the schools as having more stringent restrictions than those of a maximum security prison.  

He explains that here is a great deal of talk in the early grades about sharing, about cooperativeness, about democratic values. But with all the talk about ideals, the schools and

\[22\]Ibid., pp. 175-176.

\[23\]John Holt, "The Values We Teach in School," Grade Teacher, LXXXVII (September, 1969-June, 1970), 72.
their teachers continually set the children at each other's throats. The children are made to compete for approval of the teacher. And the children learn early that whenever one person wins in school someone else loses. "The child who shines in class usually shines at the expense of somebody else." The entire environment of the class tells the children that they are expected to participate in a kind of "cut-throat competition with each other." If they are asked to share, it is not to share the things they want to share--their knowledge, their feelings, their work. If they do share their feelings, they are accused of acting up. And if they share their ideas, they are charged with cheating.\textsuperscript{24}

Holt also deals with values in class discussions. For instance, the teacher's manual might say, "Have a discussion and bring out the following points." In such a discussion, the teacher usually talks more than all the students. This type discussion is merely making a mockery out of values. The students are never given an opportunity to discuss what interests them; they are continually cautioned to keep to the point. Students are so confused about values in school that many times they cannot relate anything that transpires in school to the outside world. The children have become so confused by the teachers' acrimonious treatment of them that they mis-trust anyone

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
over thirty. In a society held together by trust, erosion of this trust, whether between young and old or black and white, is terribly bad.\textsuperscript{25}

The students' values in the classroom cannot be expected to be different from those of the children in the home. Each respective environment will certainly influence the children's actions in each. The teacher and the parent tell the child to be truthful. Then when the telephone rings, the parent instructs the child to tell the caller that mommy is not home. The child quickly sees the dissonance between what people say and what they do. The teacher who had an unusually wakeful night would evince more authenticity if he announced to the class, "Boy, I had a bad night's sleep or I feel down in the dumps or I feel lousy... so you better watch it," than walking into class smiling and displaying false merriment.\textsuperscript{26}

Administering punishment is another example where authenticity is sometime absent. Holt contrasts the reactions in a repressive school with those in a "nice school." A child who said he hated school would be severely punished in the former school, but in the latter, he would have been told, "You don't really mean that! Oh, no, you

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 75-76.

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}
don't really hate school!" This dissonance is quite disturbing to Holt. He states that punishing a child for expressing his honest feelings is detestable. Holt advocates telling the student, "The law says you have to go to school; it doesn't say you have to like it." By such a reaction by the teacher, the children are put at ease and not made to feel ashamed to verbalize their true feelings. 27

Holt exclaims that all of these feelings of dissonance and failure of students are unnecessary. Almost every child on his first day of school "is smarter, more curious, less afraid of what he doesn't know, better at finding and figuring things out, more confident, resourceful, persistent, and independent than he will ever again be in his schooling or, unless he is very unusual and lucky, for the rest of his life." Already by closely observing and interacting with the world around him, and without any formal school instruction, he has performed a more difficult task than anything he will be asked to do in school. He has solved the mystery of language by exploring, experimenting, and finally changing and refining it until it works for him. 28

So into the school the student comes, the "curious, patient, determined, energetic, skillful learner." The

27 Ibid., p. 78.
first mistake the school makes is to teach him that learning is separate from living. Everything to him becomes a passive process; it is something that is done for him, nothing he does for himself. He is taught to read what and when the teacher desires, nothing that he desires. There is a great deal of talk about respect for the student, but from the teacher's actions, the student soon learns not to ask questions; the teacher is not there to satisfy his curiosity. One eighth grader expressed the consensus of many students: "I am nothing, or if something, something bad; I have no interests or concerns except trivial ones, nothing that I like is good, for me or for anyone else; any choices or decisions I make will be stupid; my only hope of surviving in this world is to cling to some authority and do what he says." 

The student learns many other things. He learns that to be uncertain, wrong, confused, is a crime. Right answers are what the school expects, so he learns to play the game. He learns how to confiscate answers from the teacher. He learns to dodge, bluff, fake, and cheat. He learns to be lazy. In school, he learns, "like every buck private or conscript laborer, to goldbrick, how not to work when the boss isn't looking. He learns that in real life you don't do anything unless you are bribed or bullied, or

---

29Holt, The Underachieving School, pp. 18-19.
conned into doing it, that nothing is worth doing for its own sake, or that if it is you can't do it in school." He learns to be bored, to escape from reality into daydreams, but not the fun fantasies of his pre-school days. In short, the child learns to accept practical slavery. 30

Holt acknowledges that all these negative learning experiences are unnecessary. His theories regarding how children fail in their learning can be summarized: (1) No one starts off stupid. An infant, a young child is excited, curious about his world. He learns more in his first three years than all the rest of his life. This learning capacity is destroyed by the process that is misnamed education, a process that occurs in most homes and schools. (2) Adults destroy the child's capacity to learn by making him afraid, "afraid of not doing what other people want, of not pleasing, of making mistakes, of failing, of being wrong." He is afraid to experiment, to gamble, to try anything unknown. (3) The schools destroy the disinterested love of learning in children by compelling the child to work for merit, contemptible awards (gold stars, papers marked 100, A's on report cards, honor rolls) to prove to himself that he is better than someone else. The student soon feels that the aim of all he does in school is

30Ibid., p. 19.
to get a good mark on a test, or to impress someone with his superficial knowledge. By such tactics, the school extirpates all the student's curiosity, and even his feeling that curiosity is a good and admirable thing. (4) The educational institutions break down the child's convictions that things make sense by dividing life "into arbitrary and disconnected hunks of subject matter." This is accomplished by "integrating such artificial and irrelevant devices as having children sing Swiss folk songs while they are studying the geography of Switzerland, or do arithmetic problems about railsplitting while they are studying the boyhood of Lincoln." (5) The teachers encourage the child to act stupidly, not by confusing him, but by boring him, by filling his days with dull, repetitive tasks that do little to stimulate any demands on his intelligence.31

Holt accepts that children will continue to fail until the schools become a place where children learn what they most want to know, instead of what the schools and teachers want them to know. The schools must have classrooms in which "each child in his own way can satisfy his curiosity, develop his abilities and talents, pursue his interests, and from adults and older children around him get a glimpse of the great variety and richness of life." In other words, the

child will continue to fail until he is afforded a "smorgasbord of intellectual, artistic, creative, and athletic activities, from which he can take whatever he wants, and as much as he wants, or as little."  

How Children Learn

John Holt prefaces his theories of how children learn by relating how men are busy trying to find out what goes on in the brain, electrically and chemically, what man thinks and learns. Such research, says Holt, is quite interesting, but it has nothing to do with improving learning in the schools. Rather than the schools and teachers being concerned with the intricacies of the mind, they need to know that "vivid, vital, pleasurable experiences are the easiest to remember, and that memory works best when unforced, that it is not a mule that can be made to walk by beating it."  

Holt believes that learning cannot take place in the schools until freedom is the accepted "norm" of every classroom. He explains freedom as an atmosphere where "we can learn best what we, not others, are deciding what we are going to try to learn, and when, and how, and for what reasons or purposes; when we, not others, are in the end choosing the people, materials, and experiences from which

32Ibid., p. 180.

and with which we will be learning; when we, not others, are judging how easily or quickly or well we are learning, and when we have learned enough; and above all when we feel the wholeness and openness of the world around us, and our own freedom and power and competence in it."

Freedom means freedom with structure. Holt recognizes that for anything to be free, it must have structure. He clarifies the misconception that the difference between the traditional classroom and the open or free classroom that he advocates is not that one is structured and the other unstructured, but that the traditional classroom has only two elements in it, the teacher and the students; "it is inflexible, rigid, static; it is arbitrary and external, having nothing to do with the life and needs of the class."

By contrast, the open classroom structure is quite complicated. There are as many elements and differences as there are teachers and children. The structure is both flexible and dynamic. The relationship between each child and the teacher changes from day to day. The structure is organic, internal; it grows out of the needs and abilities of the children and the teachers themselves. The children create

---

34Holt, What Do I Do Monday?, p. 95.
order, and because they create it, the order works.\textsuperscript{35}

In discussing structure, Holt feels the type of structure is not important, but what is important is that the structure not be contradictory. Children can adapt to any situation so long as it is consistent. Holt recalls that in early progressive schools, children were told to "behave any way you like." This lack of structure confused and frustrated the students. The student feels more free when he has some guidelines to follow. For instance, if a student is annoying the teacher it is better to say, "Hey, cut that out, it's driving me crazy. Or, please don't do that, I really don't like it." Then the structure is clear, the students get more information about the teacher which helps them to learn to live with him.\textsuperscript{36}

In essence, what really is important in any type of structure is the amount of choice given the student. One school that has successfully integrated freedom in the classroom is A. S. Neill's "Summerhill." Children who were frustrated, lacked confidence, courage to face life, have gone to Summerhill and progressed two, three or even five times faster than students in conventionally good schools.

\textsuperscript{35}Holt, \textit{Freedom and Beyond}, pp. 9-11.

\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 13-14.
Holt explains Summerhill's success:

Children there do many things that most adults, in home or at school, will not let them do--swear, be dirty, wear raggedy clothes, break things. . . . It also gives children a chance to manage a great deal of their lives, to make decisions and to find out from their living which are better or worse than others, and from so doing begin to feel that they can make decisions, that not all of these will necessarily be bad, that if they are bad they can see this and make changes, that they are smart and capable enough to make some sense of their lives, and don't need indefinitely to depend on the guidance or commands of others. In short, more by what it does than says, Summerhill helps the children there to feel, and often for the first time, that they are human beings of some dignity, competence, and worth. 37

In this school, children do not have to worry about disappointing the teacher; they don't have to worry about pleasing the teacher because he doesn't have any great expectations for them. He likes them the way they are. For example, if a student steals, Neill practices two old-fashioned ideas, faith and forgiveness. He merely says, "I know you stole; I do not call you a thief or think of you as thief because you stole; I know that one of these days in your own good time you will stop stealing; I can wait for it to happen." 38

Holt declares that all schools can be more like Summerhill if they incorporate the following techniques and philosophies: (1) Orderly classrooms. Such classrooms

37 Ibid., pp. 20-21, 25.

38 Ibid., p. 21.
abrogate the need for constant reminders to the children to pick up and put away unused articles. Decide on a system of cleaning up and putting away material that the children can understand and abide by most of the time. Another idea might be to construct storage containers. Boxes, cabinets or closets made by the students would solve storage problems and result in a happier teacher and more affable students. (2) Public or common property. Children need to have freedom but not at someone else's expense. They need to respect each other's property. Freedom in the classroom does not mean children should destroy any property they desire. Holt offers several suggestions for the handling of property. If possible, two rooms should be provided: one for playing, painting, making noise and another for reading, studying, being quiet. In such a setting the students would know and respond to the particular purpose of the room. Another suggestion for caring for property is the school court. When a student defaces or misuses property, either the school's or an individual's, he is tried by a jury of his peers. If the student is found guilty, he foregoes dessert or gymnastics for two weeks. Holt says that regardless of the method used to preserve property, children need to learn the value of respecting their own and common property. (3) Decision making. It is important that as many as possible of the decisions about
school be made by the students. Again, there need to be guidelines. There should be scheduled meetings for students to promote ideas and solve problems, with none extended past their regular time unless there is a two-thirds vote by the students. To assure that such democracy works, adults need to set and try to uphold in meetings a certain standard of dignity and courtesy for the students to follow. (4) Individual versus community. Tension between the needs and rights of individuals of a community are painful. One of the most painful tensions of the high school student is to realize that he wants to be free of the pressures of his parents and other adults, and at the same time to realize that to be rid of parents and society would leave him in a terrible vacuum. Students need to grow up in a society that makes sense, one that has reasonable purposes, and one that they can trust and respect.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 28-48.}

Aside from the above techniques to be utilized in classrooms, Holt prescribes several types of equipment to facilitate learning. The tape recorder is one of the best machines that technology has made available to the schools, a teaching machine that even the children can operate. The children are usually fascinated by the machine and are eager to record and play their own voices. Often they say humorous
things, sing, and tell stories. But the excitement seems to be in hearing the recordings of their own voices. The teacher could record an especially delightful story or musical program. Children could write and produce their own talk shows. The tape recorder could be utilized quite effectively in poor rural communities where children have had very little experience in talking. Holt states that he does not believe that electronic technology has made print obsolete, but a child who goes through school without becoming familiar with the technology and techniques of recording sounds is somewhat more illiterate and unprepared for life in today's society than one who does not know multiplication tables, how to divide fractions, or the dates of historical events. 40

Another excellent and exciting type of equipment is the camera. The child sees photographs of the world around him, still, or on movies, or on television. The camera provides an opportunity for the child to see much that his eyes cannot judiciously accommodate. Holt suggests movie projectors, slide projectors, and the polaroid camera. If a school does not have photography equipment, it usually can rent or borrow old or rarely used cameras from commercial photographers or nearby universities or colleges. Children are fascinated

by the operation of camera equipment and will be eager to learn to operate it themselves. And of course collecting pictures will stimulate students to compile journals, notebooks, and guidebooks to preserve their experiences.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 201-224.}

Holt reminds the reader, however, that all the advanced teaching equipment, new and beautifully furnished buildings will not alleviate failure in the schools. "The school room may be in a gloomy and ancient building, but have vitality built into it by a good teacher working with her children."\footnote{Ibid., p. 276.} It is imperative that the schools and teachers break up the pupil's failure experience and his "what-does-the-teacher-want-now" syndrome. The teacher must help the student to feel like an individual, free, by letting him write and talk about things he does not usually have in school, things that are funny or interesting because they are of immediate use to him.\footnote{Ibid., p. 278.} In our society, children have been taught to express anger, hostility, rejection, aloofness, and criticism rather than affection, warmth, desire, approval or satisfaction. Adolescents have been almost unable to express or accept positive emotions. Children need to be touched, both physically and emotionally.\footnote{Ibid., p. 272.}
In summary, Holt's theories of how children learn are: (1) Society needs to abolish educational institutions and initiate educational resources. Holt explains the difference. The "institution is serving the purpose of someone other than the learner; but it is clear that the resource is available to the learner for whatever use he may want to make of it."\(^\text{45}\) (2) Freedom needs to permeate every classroom, but it will result in students learning only when they are given flexible, but consistent structure. A child becomes quite frustrated when the teacher is permissive one moment and screams for order the next.\(^\text{46}\) (3) Children are innately curious. The schools need to provide an atmosphere where the child can satisfy his curiosity, develop his talents and creativity, pursue his interests, and from adults and other children, see the richness and variety of life. The schools must make available to children "intellectual, artistic, creative, and athletic activities" from which they may choose, as many or as little as they desire.\(^\text{47}\)


\(^{46}\) Virginia Sellers Shaw, "John Holt as I Knew Him," Grade Teacher, LXXVII (September, 1969), 89-90.

A precis of Holt's hope for the schools and the theories of how children learn can best be expressed in his own words:

Let every child be a planner, director and assessor of his own education, to allow and encourage him, with the inspiration and guidance of more experienced and expert people, and as much help as he asked for, to decide what he is to learn, when he is to learn it, how he is to learn it, and how well he is learning it. Make our schools, instead of what they are, which is jails for children, into a resource for free and independent learning, which everyone in the community, of whatever age could use as much or as little as he wanted.48

48 Holt, The Underachieving School, p. ix.
CHAPTER IV

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE THEORIES OF
CHARLES DICKENS AND JOHN HOLT

Intensive research has revealed sufficient evidence to propose that the educational theories of Charles Dickens and John Holt are closely juxtaposed. Charles Dickens in the middle nineteenth century was so appalled by the deplorable social and educational conditions that he attempted through his books, letters, and speeches to apprise the people of England of the need for reform. Some one hundred forty years later another writer, lecturer, and teacher saw a similar situation and also tried to effect a change. Upon reflection, one is amazed that America with its technological discoveries and advances of cars, jets, television, and mass media considers John Holt's theories of freedom and individualized learning in the classroom to be progressive, and even radical. As history has recorded, education is and continues to be several decades behind other economic accomplishments. England during the nineteenth century can be exonerated for its unconcern for the welfare of children because of the rapid changing economic conditions
of the Industrial Revolution. America cannot be excused for her apathy toward children and education. America is experiencing more affluence than in any previous period; it boasts less poverty and better educational opportunity for children than ever before. Holt notes that many of our buildings are architecturally attractive, furnished with the most advanced technological equipment, but little consideration is being given to the individual needs of the children.

Dickens throughout *Hard Times* reiterates that no consideration is given to the pleasures or imagination of the children. They are forced to memorize aggregates of heterogeneous knowledge. Mr. M'Choakumchild prided himself in teaching facts, facts, and only facts; there was no room for levity, no time for children to engage in any thought or emotions.\(^1\) While such a school seems unlike modern American "progressive schools," there really is an affinity. Perhaps American teachers are more subtle in their abrogation of students' thinking, but nevertheless the practice is very real. Charles Reich says the purpose of schools is no longer to teach, but to indoctrinate students, remolding their thinking. The students are compelled to accept someone else's ideas, someone else's ideas, someone else's ideas, someone else's ideas, someone else's ideas.

\(^1\)Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 254.
version of facts. This statement sounds much like M'Choakumchild's inculcation of facts, facts, facts to students.

In *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens condemned schools where "the bright childish imagination is utterly discouraged, and where bright childish faces... are gloomily and grimly scared out of countenance; where I have never seen among the pupils, whether boys or girls, anything but little parrots and small calculating machines." Holt seems to echo Dickens when he says a young child comes to school eager, curious, patient, determined, energetic and skillful. Immediately the school teaches him that learning is separate from living. Everything to him becomes a passive process; learning is something done for him, not by him. He is taught to read what and when the teacher desires, nothing that he desires. The teacher is not there to satisfy his curiosity. Dickens, as Holt, believes that such systems of education will not enable the child to develop his personality and live a happy and fruitful life in a complex society.

Dickens was quite outspoken about the state's neglect in providing assistance to the schools. Holt states that

---

2Reich, p. 133.
3Shepherd, pp. 181-184.
5Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 177.
society expects the school to impart to the students traditions and values of their own culture, to expose them to the world in which they live, and to prepare them for employment and success in this world. Holt contends that the schools have been assigned too many roles. Heretofore, these tasks have been the responsibility of the society and community; the schools are being asked to fulfill too many functions.  

Like Dickens, Holt feels the state and society are neglecting the schools.

Dickens and Holt are almost alike in their defense of children's rights. Dickens demanded that children have their rightful place in school. "He put children first; appealed for a happy school life; pleaded for the development of their imagination, care of their health, kind treatment of their feelings, and encouraged confidence in their right to live as children." He believed children should be the center of any school system. Dickens desired to effect reform so that children would be very happy, especially during their school days.

All of Dickens's speeches and novels stress human imagination, dignity, and sense of fun. He believed, like Froebel, that children were fundamentally good, not evil; therefore, self-expression should be encouraged through

---

6Holt, The Underachieving School, p. 4.
7Manning, Dickens on Education, p. 204.
"such media as song, language, drawing, music and gesture. . . ." He saw the necessity for experimentation and physical activities. He thought a child learned by doing; he should have an opportunity for more games and play, music and song and milder methods of discipline. Holt states that it is important for students to make as many decisions as is possible in the schools. And to assure that democracy works, the adults need to try to uphold a certain standard of dignity and courtesy for the children to follow. Children need to grow up in a society that makes sense and has reasonable purposes, a society that they can trust and respect. Holt, like Dickens, asserts that children enjoy and learn by talking, writing, singing, experimentation. One of the best ways to facilitate activities is the use of the tape recorder. A child can talk, tell stories, sing and then immediately hear himself. A camera can provide the child a realistic view of life through pictures; he can even operate the machine himself. Holt sees words, either in talk or writing, as an act of self-awareness, an act of self-expression. But for a child to be able to write or talk, he must have a strong sense of awareness. This

8Herford, p. 39.
9Ibid.
10Holt, Freedom and Beyond, pp. 28-48.
11Ibid.
awareness can be achieved only in schools and classrooms where there is plenty of time, large and small spaces, and above all, encouragement. Holt agrees with Dickens that children must have an opportunity for play. Sadly, the schools do not recognize this need. They try to "seduce or coerce children into the classroom into abandoning their own 'play culture' in favor of the grownups' work culture." Children are confused by this dissonance between their home life and school. To the child, his work, his play, his learning are not separated from each other, but at school he is taught that they are different; the fun and play must remain outside the school.

Discipline is another area of concern for Dickens. He shows his contempt for punishment in Nicholas Nickleby. Dotheboys Hall was a "diabolical convenience for callous parents, guardians, and brutal exploiter of defenseless youth." It was one of the worst institutions where children were maltreated, starved, and unmercifully punished. Holt, today, recalls a similar school discussed by Jonathan Kozol in Death at an Early Age. The children are severely threatened and punished for any expression of enjoying school. The teachers made sure that no one witnessed their

---

13 Holt, Freedom and Beyond, p. 254.
14 Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, pp. 97-98.
beating the children with rattan whips; the teachers frequently hit and slapped the children on the face or head. One child was hospitalized for a blow on the head, but because the teacher denied the accusation, the parents could not prosecute her.\textsuperscript{15} Americans should be ashamed that schools in the twentieth century are virtually no more advanced than those in England during the nineteenth century. Holt believes that discipline can best be effected through moderation and consistency. A child should be given only two choices at the beginning of a school year. When he has shown that he is responsible, four or five choices should be afforded him. In this manner, the classroom can be gradually changed from a formal class and teacher-directed learning to open class and learner-directed learning, and the students will not feel threatened. The school day should be divided into periods, with schedules written on the board. The children need to know what is expected of them. Man is a social, cultural animal, and children recognize this fact and want to understand and be a part of this network of agreements, customs, habits, and rules binding adults together. They want to do right unless they become convinced that they cannot do right. Children seldom misbehave in church. They see adults sitting quietly and

\textsuperscript{15}Jonathan Kozol, \textit{Death at an Early Age} (New York, 1968), pp. 9-12.
observing rituals, and they want to act the same way. Children who live around adults who are courteous to each other, and to them, will soon learn to be courteous. Children need to understand discipline; they need to know the consequences for bad behavior. When a child is told to do something and punished when he does not fulfill his task, he is learning to understand the natural consequences of his acts. Former Vice President Spiro Agnew said to a convention of farmers in Chicago, "I would think restoration of discipline and order ought to be a first priority--even ahead of curriculum--in the schools of this country."

The farmers' applause indicated that what they want is more coercion, more threats, more punishment, more fear to make their children more afraid. Such an attitude seems to indicate that the farmers experience a kind of slavery, so they feel that their children should also share this servitude. ¹⁶ Holt believes that discipline, whether it is strict or moderate, needs to be explicit; the students need to know the limits. If doing or saying something is going to get students in trouble, they need and want to know about it in advance. ¹⁷

Another area Dickens and Holt agree on is the disturbing fact that education is not available for the poor children.

¹⁶Holt, Freedom and Beyond, pp. 100-114.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 12.
Dickens noted that the main purpose of the charity schools was not to provide a good education for the poor, but to indoctrinate the children in church ritual and encourage them into accepting their status of subordination. The schools constantly strived to remind them of their inferior status in life.\(^{18}\) And in the workhouse schools the children were not educated; they were farmed out to farmers, chimney sweeps, undertakers, and later to the factories, to do unbearable work.\(^{19}\) Holt subscribes that in the present schools the poor learn little or nothing except perhaps to think that they are incapable of learning. "Many of them get more frightened, hopeless, defeated, stupid, angry, and self-destructive every year they stay there...." In most schools and school systems, poor children are in a great many ways discriminated against, humiliated, and often brutally treated." In schools where corporal punishment is allowed, where the teachers may assault and beat children, it is the poor children who get beaten the most and the worst.\(^{20}\) Holt asserts that the only way poor children will be helped is to provide them cheaper, more

\(^{18}\)Jones, pp. 1-60.

\(^{19}\)Children's Employment Commission, Parliamentary Papers, XV (London, 1842), 21, 66, 98.

\(^{20}\)Holt, Freedom and Beyond, p. 191.
widely available arrangements and resources for learning from reading and writing to medicine, economics, law and order. But above all, "they need a society in which there are more opportunities, a society committed to doing away with poverty and to making available and possible an active, interesting, and useful life to all its members."

From the above comparative analysis of Dickens's and Holt's theories of education, sufficient evidence has been set forth to conclude that their philosophies and aims in the field of education are quite analogous. And all the theories of Dickens and Holt presented in this paper are subordinate to or extant in their one major belief--kindness. Dickens throughout his writings overtly and covertly showed that a child will learn better and respond more quickly to instruction administered in a kind-hearted manner. He outlined no profound, radical method for educating children. He did not prescribe intellectual excellence. He did, however, believe that every individual is laudable and should be extended benevolent charity. The one school that Dickens always cited as an exemplary school of kindness was Dr. Strong's school. He called the school "an excellent school. There was always an appeal to the honor of the boys. Every boy felt he was a part of the school, and every boy was proud

---

21 Ibid., p. 216.
Holt in all his books, articles, and speeches quite clearly expressed the same doctrine. He says children cannot be bullied or driven like mules; they can learn only through kindness. They must be recognized as unique individuals. Each person must feel the "wholeness and openness of the world around us, and our own freedom and power and competence in it."23

Dickens's theories can be summarized by reiterating his belief that "the maximum amount of efficiency and efficacy in education or in life is secured where there is mutual understanding, cooperation, and sympathy between public, parents, masters, and pupils."24

And Holt, like Dickens, says, "I think children learn better when they learn what they want to learn when they want to learn it, and how they want to learn it, learning for their own curiosity and not at somebody else's order."25 "What we need to do, and all we need to do, is bring as much of the world as we can into the school and classroom;

22Dickens, David Copperfield, pp. 139-140.
24Manning, Dickens on Education, p. 208.
give children as much help and guidance as they need and ask for; listen respectfully when they feel like talking, and then get out of the way. We can trust them to do the rest. 26

26 Holt, How Children Learn, p. 189.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Chesterton, Gilbert Keith, Charles Dickens, New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1906.


Coveney, Peter, Poor Monkey, London, Rockliff, 1957.


__________________________, David Copperfield, Chicago, Scott Foresman, 1951.

__________________________, Dombey and Son, Chicago, Belford, Clarke & Co., 1885.


__________________________, The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898.


__________________________, The Old Curiosity Shop, London, Chapman and Hall, 1840.


Humphreys, Arthur Lee, Charles Dickens and his First Schoolmaster, Manchester, Percy Brothers, Ltd., 1926.


Lambert, Margaret, When Victoria Began to Reign, London, Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1937.


Manning, John, Dickens on Education, Toronto, University of Toronto, 1959.


Nicoll, Sir William Robertson, Dickens' Own Story, New York, Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1923.


**Articles**


Hardy, E., "Yorkshire Schools," *Living Age*, CCLXIX (April, 1911), 218-220.


Hill, T. W., "The Values We Teach in School," *Grade Teacher*, LXXXVII (September, 1969-June, 1970), 72.

Matchett, W., "Dickens at Wellington House Academy," *Living Age*, CCLXXI (November, 1910), 78-86.


Michaelson, George, "An Interview with Alistair Cooke: Britain's 'Mr. America' Tells it Like it is," *Fort Worth Star Telegram Parade* (March 3, 1974), 6.


Reports


Encyclopedia Articles


Unpublished Materials