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## Disease, Bread, Efficiency: Rhetorics of Victorian Education Reform

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DISEASE, BREAD, EFFICIENCY: RHETORICS OF VICTORIAN EDUCATION REFORM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
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in

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by

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## ABSTRACT

*Disease, Bread, Efficiency: Rhetorics of Victorian Education Reform* arose from my observation that, historically speaking, Anglo-American schools have always been “in crisis.” I argue that the crisis of the “failing school” is a rhetorical problem rather than an economic problem as most scholarship suggests. Much like the cultural myth of “the One True Love,” education reform debates tend to position the school as an institution that can rescue the nation from all perceived social ills. Not only is this unrealistic, the patterns of language are inconsistent as ideas about the purpose of school are translated into policy. This causes further disjuncture between ideal notions of the public school and its reality. I treat a range of archival materials through a variety of theoretical frames including metaphor criticism and Kenneth Burke’s notion of the terministic screen, which illustrates that school failure is not an objective occurrence but a rhetorical construction designed to achieve predetermined social ends. This research uncovers three insoluble conditions of public schools in capitalistic societies: a tension between the need for collective education while privileging individualism, a gap between the expansive purposes envisioned by the general public and the narrow measures policy can enact, and a lack of attention to the circulation of institutional energy. I conclude that conversations about education reform can become more productive by respecting the insoluble conditions and searching for non-binary ways to think about schooling.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

“Let’s not kid ourselves – we are in the midst of a National Education Emergency.” So said former presidential candidate Mitt Romney in a 2012 speech at the Latino Coalition Annual Economic Summit (“Remarks”). Indeed, it seemed George W. Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” legislation of 2001 has spurred an education reform renaissance. Led by policy activists such as Michelle Rhee and technology moguls such as Bill Gates, these reformers seek to “fix” and “disrupt” the perceived failures of the American public school system. The answers, these reformers announce, are private sector solutions that would decentralize the school system through school choice vouchers, charter schools, massive online open courses (MOOCs), and “parent trigger” laws that allow parents to take over failing schools. Though the recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act muted education as a top issue in the 2016 election cycle, it was very much in play in the 2012 election cycle. Certain themes kept occurring—individual autonomy, private enterprise, and competition. Indeed, education reform based on hyper-capitalistic principles has become a veritable cottage industry. Movies such as *Waiting for Superman* and *Won’t Back Down* champion decentralizing the public school system through measures such as vouchers and charter schools. Michelle Rhee’s organization StudentsFirst pushes “parental empowerment” as the second of its three-pronged attack on public schools. In January 2010 activists promoted the first School Choice Week, an annual event replete with screenings of pro-school choice documentaries and a “Whistle Stop Train Tour” that snakes across the Gulf Coast and southwest.

While this insistence that schools are failing and can only be saved by free-market principles feels uniquely American, similar arguments were made in Victorian-era England. Until the Elementary Education Act of 1870, England had a “non-system” of education,

consisting of a “patchwork” of private schools—both non-profit and for-profit. There were no regulations to guarantee simple *access* to a local school, let alone compulsory attendance, although through the years loopholes were found to create state-level funding and accountability measures. Many Victorians considered the mere idea of state involvement in education an affront to their liberties. As Sascha Auerbach notes, "Much of the opposition to compulsory education was linked to broader political concerns over the intrusion of state into private life and the threat to the ideal of liberty that such intrusion represented. Compulsory education, as a contested and often unpopular policy, represented a particularly fruitful avenue of attack for those who opposed the expansion of the state into day-to-day life" (759).

Although Americans may presume to have cornered the market on love of individual liberty and distrust of the government, the Victorians used this same frontiersmanship argument against state-sponsored education. An 1856 editorial in *Dublin University Magazine* mocked the opponents of state-sponsored education, conceding, “It may be a sign of our ignorance as much as our independence, that we reject coercion; but we refuse to be coerced” (“Position and Prospects”). The staunchly conservative *Morning Post* contended, “Compulsion in itself is a harsh word, but the idea associated with it is still more repugnant to our better feelings. It is much better to leave people to act upon their sense of social duty than to coerce them by law” (“Compulsory Education”). In response to a town meeting in 1866 to deliberate over those proposed laws, the *Leeds-Mercury* retorted, “The speakers at the Manchester meeting were mostly ultra-Liberals, and we are, therefore, not surprised to find that their first idea is to abridge the liberty at present enjoyed by individuals” (“The Times”). This belief in the individual spurs the privileging of private enterprise. Sounding much like former Indiana governor Mitch Daniels who championed the “Yellow Pages test” in 2012 (Lambert), future prime minister Lord

Salisbury contended in 1872 that “whenever a thing which might be done, and as a rule ought to be done, by the energy and enterprise of individuals, is undertaken by the State, there is somewhere something unsound” (“Lord Salisbury”). Though today's burgeoning interest in charter schools feels contemporary, the Victorians had similar ideas. For example, the writers of an 1855 editorial claimed there were many “who are willing that aid should be given by the State to education, but they think that aid should be given to corporations or religious organisations, who will undertake to do all the teaching” (“Duty of the State”).

The similar rhetoric deployed in these two eras motivated this project. Why, in two separate countries in two different centuries, are the same arguments about the public school system occurring? In addition, why are schools consistently viewed as failing to perform their social duties? In wrestling with these questions, I hypothesized that the crisis of the “failing school” is a rhetorical problem rather than a socioeconomic problem as most scholarship suggests. Because language plays an inextricable role in the formation of social problems, I begin with the assumption that crises in public policy begin as rhetorical crises. This project examines how rhetorical strategies deployed in education reform debates create and frame expectations about public school systems. These expectations are often unrealistic, placing problems stemming from a variety of institutional failures onto a single institution: the school. Much like the contemporaneous cultural myth of “the One True Love” who can fulfill a romantic partner's every need, public schools become the institution responsible for saving nations economically, socially, and politically. Perceived deficiencies in the public school system are therefore not confined to the sociocultural conditions, such as poverty, that usually receive blame. Rather, they begin through the expectations created by metaphors and terministic screens used in education reform debates.



Victorian England is an ideal era for exploring this thesis. Some Western countries, such as France and Germany, have a tradition of carefully crafted policies that were maintained by the central government dating back to the Middle Ages. Other Western countries, such as the United States, ceded educational policy to local leaders; as the role of federal government grew in public life through the 20th century, national education reform happened on an *ad hoc* basis. Victorian England lies on a point between these two extremes. The middle and upper-class stakeholders produced a large archive of material through much public debate that played out in newspapers, books, and Parliament, as England deliberately, if hesitantly, moved from an entirely decentralized “patchwork” of schools to the system of public schools known today.

### **Education as Rhetorical Crisis**

In an 1861 speech praising the standardized exams upon which school funding had recently become dependent, Lord Palmerston complained, “When mankind seize upon a word, they often imagine that word to be an argument. They go about repeating it, thinking they have arrived at some great and irresistible conclusion.” The particular word against which Lord Palmerston takes this stand is *cramming*. Opponents of these exams and the government's associated funding schemes had argued that these high-stakes tests narrowed the curriculum to only reading, writing, and arithmetic and that the rote nature of the testing experience had turned education into simple memorization exercises. They termed this process cramming, and indeed—if newspaper transcripts of public meetings can be trusted—the word was leveled as a trump card against which opponents could level no counter attack.

The way in which Victorian opponents of standardized tests wielded *cramming* illustrates James Gee's assertion that we allow language “to do most of our thinking for us” (86). That is,

words contain embedded ideologies “and these theories and beliefs lead to social action and the maintenance and creation of social worlds” (Gee 18). <Cramming> was not simply a word with a definition that conveyed a literal meaning. It was a word that conveyed an implicit social theory, which Gee defines as “a set of generalizations about an area...in terms of which descriptions of phenomena in that area can be couched and explaining can be offered” (15). That is, the observation of a student studying for an exam may on its surface appear value-neutral. Gee, however, points out that <studying> is an interpretation—another observer may describe the student as <learning>, another <memorizing>, another <cramming>. The chosen word reveals a belief the observer holds not only about that action, but how that action relates to the observer's social beliefs concerning the “relationships between people in a society” (Gee 8). Gee argues that definitions of socially contested words “are what lead to the adoption of social beliefs and the theories behind them, and these theories and beliefs lead to social action” (18). The person who observes <cramming> will hold quite a different stance toward examinations, and therefore act differently than Lord Palmerston, who argues the student is <learning>. Because of language’s ability to shape perception, Gee argues that “It is a mistake to think that the primary function of human language is to talk about the world. Rather, any human language primarily functions to allow speakers to take various *perspectives* or *viewpoints* on the world” (112). There are two primary tools I use in this project to consider the embedded viewpoints about Victorian education reform: metaphor analysis and terministic screens.

In 1843, a London clergyman wrote a letter to the *Morning Post* in favor of compulsory education for all children in England. He first likened education to bread, asking what “is to become of the starving souls of the poor children?” and later shifted the analogy to that of medical discourse in lamenting, “Is the patient to die, while the doctors jangle or hesitate? Will

the accredited physician forbear his treatment of the case because clamorous pretenders denounce him as a charlatan?” His pleas are poignant but easily dismissible as overly-emotional flourishes that do not meaningfully contribute any ideas to the education debate, merely pathos.

This notion of metaphor-as-decoration has lost standing as theorists, particularly in cognitive linguistics, began studying how metaphor not only conveys thought but also structures thought. In their groundbreaking study *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson draw from the work of Michael Reddy, noting that language is often perceived as a conduit. Common phrases like, “It’s hard to get the idea across to him” and “I gave you that idea” compare ideas to objects that are put into containers (linguistic expression) and sent along (communication). Lakoff and Johnson challenge this metaphor as it ignores the importance of context, but nonetheless use it as an example of a *structural metaphor*, in which one concept is structured in terms of another. Other examples they use are “Time is money” and “Argument is war.” Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphor is fundamental to conceptual systems; concepts “structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people” (1). Therefore, conceptual metaphors that relate the understanding of an idea in one domain to another domain not only express our experiences, they create them.

Metaphors, then, are not rhetorical flourish, but a tool that creates social reality by structuring thought (Hart et al 46). Hart et al contend, “Metaphors are helpful for studying politics because they are often underestimated” (46). They suggest that if one thinks about politics as an occupation, one believes and behaves differently than one who thinks about politics as a contest. Lakoff and Johnson go so far as to call the metaphor a “self-fulfilling prophecy” because “We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of

metaphor” (156-158). They use the example of President Carter referring to the energy crisis as “the moral equivalent of war;” policies were created around identifying enemies, threats, targets, intelligence, and other martial entities, thus reinforcing the notion that the energy crisis was a war.

This reality has serious consequences when it comes to matters of public policy. In the case of the metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson explain that truth is not the central function of a metaphor; rather, “We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor” (158). Donald Schön labels this process *naming and framing*, in which stories embedded in metaphor construct particular views of reality (26). These two processes:

carry out the essential problem-setting functions. They select for attention a few salient features and relations from what would otherwise be an overwhelmingly complex reality. They give these elements a coherent organization, and they describe what is wrong with the present situation in such a way as to set the direction for its future transformation. Through the processes of naming and framing, the stories make a 'normative leap' from data to recommendations, from fact to values, from 'is' to 'ought'. (Schön 26)

In *Frame Reflection*, Schön uses several case studies to demonstrate his theory regarding the impact that naming and framing have on public policy, specifically that unsuccessful reform movements are not hindered by a deficiency in problem *solving* but in problem *setting*. He uses the homelessness crisis in 1990s Massachusetts as his first illustration. To some residents of Massachusetts, urban housing was a disease that needed to be cured. To others, urban housing constituted a close-knit and ethnically important family in need of protection. The former, therefore, wanted to demolish and rebuild what they viewed as slums, while the latter sought to improve existing conditions of the buildings and their residents. The problem is first named—homelessness in Massachusetts—and then framed—in this case, as a disease or as a family.

Because the frames set the problem from different perspectives, the suggested solutions also necessarily differ. Lakoff and Johnson describe this process as a means of categorization, noting that, “To highlight certain properties is necessarily to downplay or hide others, which is what happens whenever we categorize something. Focusing on one set of properties shifts our attention away from others” (Lakoff and Johnson 163).

Another means of channeling attention is the terministic screen as theorized by Kenneth Burke. Because any particular term cannot encompass the whole of a phenomenon, Burke asserts that “even something so 'objectively there' as behavior must be observed through one or another kind of *terministic screen*, that directs the attention in keeping with its nature” (Burke 49). Burke further explains, “Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality” (Burke 45). <Cramming>, for example, reflects the increased importance of examinations but selects the rote quality of those exams and deflects the notion that memorization has value in the learning process. Therefore, “many of the 'observations' are but implications of the particular terminology in terms of which the observations are made. In brief, much that we take as observations about 'reality' may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice terms” (Burke 46). To wit, we see what we look for. Language mediates our experience with reality; words communicate social thoughts and feelings about objects and concepts. Those embedded social thoughts and feelings, in turn, shape our view of reality.

## Disease, Bread, Efficiency

Though many excellent accounts of education reform movements exist in the fields of history, philosophy, and literary criticism, none grapple to my satisfaction with the rhetorical aspects of the education debate. While these scholars shed light on the historical, social, economic, and literary influences on education reform, they tend not to engage with specific language and, more to the point, *how that language functions* in education debates.

Though this project is indebted to an array of sources that detail the historical aspects of Victorian schooling, here I would like to acknowledge the works most closely connected with the specific topic of education reform. *English Education 1789-1902* by John William Adamson gives a thorough account of the development of English school system, with particular attention to how cultural influences helped develop education policy. D.W. Sylvester and John Roach narrow the subject of education reform by focusing on particular subjects. Sylvester's *Robert Lowe and Education* details the statesman's involvement with education policy and argues that the controversial "payment by results" school funding scheme was less deleterious for English schools than most historians assume. Roach's aptly titled *Public Examinations in England, 1850-1900* traces the rise of interest in standardized exams in the Victorian era as a means of shifting from an aristocratic culture to a merit-based one; Cathy Shuman builds off Roach's work by analyzing the critique of examinations authors such as Dickens and Trollope wove into their novels. Sheldon Rothblatt also tackles the theme of the connection between merit-minded democracy and education, though in much wider scope, in *Education's Abiding Moral Dilemma: Merit and Worth in the Cross-Atlantic Democracies*, which compares developments of education policy in England, Scotland, and the United States.

Education reform has also proved fruitful for literary scholars. Raymond Williams's cultural studies approach has been profoundly influential. He himself explicitly addresses the interplay between literature and popular opinions about Victorian schools in *The Long Revolution*. In Chapter 2, he uses England in the 1840s as an example of how one might undertake his method of cultural analysis. He includes the assessment that in fiction, “schools, almost without exception, are shown as terrible: not only are they places of temptation and wickedness, mean, cruel and educationally ridiculous, but also they are inferior to the home and family, as a way of bringing up children” (64). He devotes Chapter 4 to the tracing of changes in the British education system from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century in order to illustrate his concept of social character. Several books have since followed this tradition of putting Victorian fiction in dialogue with other discourses. In *Our Victorian Education*, Dinah Birch uses fiction and non-fiction books to argue Victorian writers viewed education as incomplete without attention to matters of emotion as well as matters of fact. Patrick Brantlinger has analyzed the dynamic interplay between Victorian literature and politics in regards to reformist policy in *The Spirit of Reform* and *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth Century Fiction*. Richard D. Altick has also investigated literacy as a contentious issue in *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900*.

This project is further indebted to the works of critics who have focused on schooling as a socio-cultural phenomenon. For example, Basil Bernstein speculates that working-class and middle-class students have different success rates in education because they are socialized in language differently, while Jean Anyon has studied the disparate curriculums implemented in schools that serve different socio-economic classes. James Paul Gee examines how home cultures influence the success rates of minority populations. These studies align with Pierre

Bourdieu's belief that institutions such as schools exist to replicate the dominant culture.

Raymond Williams states that school systems serve three general but intertwined functions: to inculcate conformity to the dominant social character, provide general knowledge befitting an educated person, and train students in specific skills required for their adult work (126-127).

David Nasaw argues that schools are fundamentally "contested' institutions" belonging neither to corporations nor communities and thus maintain "several agendas and several purposes" (243). In the history of thinking about schooling, then, there remain two key themes. First, schools exist to stabilize social norms by perpetuating society's institutional values.

Paradoxically, the purpose of schools as manifested in curricula remains in contention. Though these critics' approaches to analyzing school systems differ from mine, their insights have influenced the way I interpret the artifacts from my archive.

Finally, the idea of the "policy cycle" as presented by David Tyack and Larry Cuban in *Tinkering toward Utopia* provides this project its structure. According to Tyack and Cuban, the policy cycle progresses in three stages: discussion, adoption, implementation. The first phase of "policy talk" diagnoses problems with schools and proposes solutions. In phase two, which they call "policy action," educational authorities choose a solution and its attendant official policies. In the final phase of implementation, the policies are put into practice. Inevitably, Tyack and Cuban argue, the implementation cannot live up to the ideals of the discussion for a variety of reasons: policies are often vague or contradictory and therefore difficult to apply, socioeconomic realities are often not taken into consideration in drafting policies, top-down reforms increase teacher workloads and thus burnout, progress for some groups may be perceived as regress for others, or cultural values have changed by the time a policy reaches the implementation stage. This leads to the perception that the policy has failed, prompting the start of another policy cycle.



I devote one chapter to each of these phases of designing a centralized school system in the Victorian era, but focus on the rhetorical rather than strictly cultural or political conditions. Chapter 2 explores the cultural conditions that imbue the rhetoric analyzed in later chapters with their significance, particularly anxieties about education's ability to hasten or hinder political revolution. This reveals education policy's originating function as a means to control the lower class. Chapter 3 considers three salient metaphors deployed in education debates: <ignorance is a disease>, <education is bread>, and <students are fields>. These metaphors set specific expectations regarding the benefits a school system might provide to English security, primarily through inculcation of middle-class morality in the lower class, and contained tacit arguments about the efficacy of such a system. Those social expectations, however, were not always shared by politicians charged with crafting policy, as a close reading of commissioner reports and teacher training manuals in Chapter 4 demonstrates. Matters of policy were driven by the terministic screen <efficiency>, which confined the curriculum to skills that were easily measured with little consideration afforded to imparting knowledge that would satisfy the social expectations. Chapter 5 follows the consequences of that policy by focusing on the use of <pass> as a terministic screen from the education Codes of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Policymakers presumed that making school funding contingent on the number of students who passed a yearly examination would increase the quality of a public school education; however, it in effect impeded student learning and in many cases decreased school quality. Chapter 6 thinks through the resonances from the Victorian era in our time by considering George W. Bush's landmark No Child Left Behind law as expressed in presidential debates between 2000 and 2008. Doing so reveals a phenomenon similar to that of the Victorian education reform movement: the expectations set in promoting a reform and the policies written to carry out that reform do not

align, creating an inevitable perception of failure. Additionally, the language contained in policy can be easily manipulated, preventing meaningful evaluations of school efficacy. Careful attention to the word choices in these policy cycles suggests that education reform is a rhetorical problem because metaphors and terministic screens create expectations that are fundamentally unrealistic and not shared between members of the general public and policymakers. I thus argue that this research exposes three insoluble conditions of public schools in capitalistic societies: a tension between the need for collective education while privileging individualism, a gap between the expansive purposes envisioned by the general public and the narrow measures policy can enact, and a lack of attention to the circulation of institutional energy. While this project cannot solve these problems, I do believe that a more deliberate focus on these conditions may lead to more effective conversations about education reform.

## CHAPTER 2. A CONFLUENCE OF INFLUENCES ON VICTORIAN EDUCATION

In the opening scene of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, Superintendent Gradgrind grills young Sissy Jupe about horses, objecting to any 'extraneous' detail she might include. When she does not describe a horse using such words as "quadruped" and "gramnivorous," Mr. Gradgrind declares, "Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!" Although a prime example of Dickens' penchant for satire, this scene reinforces the stereotype of nineteenth-century education as an endeavor involving skill and drill. This approach, however, is at odds with the philosophy espoused by many Victorians. Educators, politicians, journalists, and citizens writing letters to the editor envisioned education as a practice that not only imparts factual information but also develops character. The Earl of Carnarvon best encapsulated the spirit of this rhetoric at a public meeting convened to discuss the aims of the National Society for Promoting the Education of the poor in the Principles of the Established Church in 1865. He asserted that

the truth was that the difficulty in this case turned upon the fallacy of using the word 'education' in a doubtful sense. Though the fallacy was 2,000 years old it still existed, and was as mischievous as ever. By education was meant the bringing up, the training, of an individual, the forming of his character, the combining of the different parts and faculties of his nature, and subordinating them all to one great moral and religious end. ("The Earl of Carnarvon")

Proper education, then, involved what we now consider the "whole child," though this concept is unarticulated in Victorian writings. Most education reformers believed students must not only gain academic knowledge but also learn the self-discipline, taste, and habits of mind necessary to perform their social and economic duties. Furthermore, many Victorians viewed education as something every person receives—whether he goes to school or not. Many reformers, particularly in the 1830s and 1840s, argued in favor of state-supported education so that lower-class children would learn the "right" values rather than the immoral or antisocial

ones they might acquire in the home or on the street if left to their own devices. Educator John Dufton, for example, believed that “The chief difficulty in teaching the ignorant does not arise from their incapacity to receive instruction, but from that capacity being already overloaded with previous and depraved instruction” (5).

The public school system has become such an ingrained component of American cultures, it may be difficult to conceive of a time before it existed, but the current educational structure is an invention of the late 19th century. As late as 1866, *The Daily News* published a letter by a correspondent calling himself Crito about the dissatisfactory state of education in England. Crito complains, “It has no system, and scarcely any definite principles; its operations are irregular, inconsistent, and constantly changing, subject to the caprice of the minister of state or the officials employed.” Roughly speaking, sons of the aristocracy attended expensive grammar and public schools<sup>1</sup>, mostly learning classical languages. Middle and lower-class families might be able to send their children to an elementary school, which taught basic academic skills, a for-profit “adventure” school of dubious quality, or a Sunday school that focused on moral lessons, sometimes to the exclusion of academics. The backbone of English education, however, was the church school. As leaders of the official state religion, administrators of Church of England schools felt they deserved a monopoly on education, but dissenting schools, particularly those supported by Methodists, were becoming increasingly popular. This 'non-system' created problems of unequal access to education due to cost and location. First, because there was no state funding available<sup>2</sup>, all schools had to charge fees.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally, the term *public school* applied only to all-male boarding schools independent of any church affiliation. By the 1860s, the term also became applied to describe schools intended to educate the “public” or the “masses,” referring to the lower class.

<sup>2</sup> Beginning in 1839, federal grants for building schools were available but government expenditures were limited to one-time construction costs.

Some institutions, notably Sunday and church schools, were supported by philanthropists, which allowed them to waive fees for lower-class students, but this means of allocation burdened middle-class families who could not afford fees but were ineligible for waivers. Instability often ensued, as schools could close at any time should they fail to collect enough fees or donations to stay open. Secondly, there were no regulations regarding physical access to a school. School managers set up shop where they presumed they would best uphold their mission. In consequence, many parts of England, particularly rural areas, had no schools at all (Williams 135). Even if a family lived near a school, if the school fees were too high or the school was of the wrong denomination, children would be kept at home or gain employment rather than attend school.

Raymond Williams contends that “the way in which education is organized can be seen to express, consciously and unconsciously, the wider organization of culture and society, so that what has been thought of as simple distribution is in fact an active shaping to particular social ends” (125). The social ends desired by the middle and upper classes in the Victorian era involved raising the moral and intellectual capacities of the working class without advancing their socioeconomic status or abetting rebellion. In this respect, the interests of the two classes coincided. The upper class increasingly felt a need to preserve the social class system which they had dominated for centuries; the rise of the middle class and the extension of Parliamentary representation to lower classes threatened their concentration of power. The relatively new middle class, meanwhile, sought to establish their legitimacy by drawing clear demarcations between themselves and the lower class. An educated lower class had the potential to endanger this hierarchy by enabling manual workers to qualify for traditionally middle-class jobs. This blurs the carefully constructed demarcation between middle/lower class, and decreases the

number of workers willing to fill domestic service positions that both the upper and middle classes depended upon. Much of the education debate concerned balancing the need for an educated work force that could contribute to the technological advances of the Industrial Age without destabilizing the social class hierarchy upon which English capitalism depended. In striking this balance, stakeholders reinforced stereotypes and assumptions about the character of the lower class. Ironically, though education was promoted as a means of advancing English primacy over other European nations, it was also feared that same education could dismantle English culture.

The stakes of mass education were thus high and paradoxical, causing reform to advance slowly over the course of fifty years. Most of the work in the first twenty years of the Victorian era involved changing opinions about a hypothetical centralized school system, such as that it would be a training ground of radicalism or “un-English” violation of liberty and *laissez-faire* capitalism. During the civil service reform of the 1850s—which sought to curtail nepotism—faith in the objectivity, and therefore validity, of standardized exams as the ideal means of individual evaluation soared. M.P. Robert Lowe took this faith to the extreme by instituting “Payment by Results” in 1862, which based school funding on the results of annual examinations.<sup>3</sup> Though history has not been kind to Lowe’s education policies, he does deserve credit for eventually becoming a loud voice supporting education legislation. This first Parliamentary legislation, the Elementary Education Act of 1870, is credited to Liberal M.P. William Forster. Though the bill ensured every child in England had physical access to a school, it was modest in scope, most notably by leaving the issue of compulsory attendance for each parish to decide for itself. Compulsory attendance did become mandatory at the state level in the

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<sup>3</sup> The complexities of this policy are analyzed in Chapter 5.

Elementary Education Act of 1876, though school fees were not abolished until 1891, in the final Elementary Education Act of the century.

This chapter explores three components of Victorian society essential to understanding the education reform debate: fear of political revolution, faith in capitalism, and fretfulness concerning the social upheavals of the Industrial Revolution. Reformers and conservatives alike draw on these themes throughout the century to gain support for their visions of English education.

### **Jacobin Anxiety**

In 1866, with the passage of the first Elementary Education Act on the horizon, an article on the history of English education in the *Pall-Mall Gazette* reminded its readers that the “old-fashioned advocates of ignorance honestly believed that it was impossible for a poor man to learn to read and write without being inoculated with a desire to pull down the house of Lords and set up a species of Jacobinical communism” (“Popular Education and Discontent”). The article argues that far from disrupting the political system, “The antagonism between riches and poverty was far more real and bitter before reading and writing became common acquirements than it is now” (“Popular Education and Discontent”). This assertion encapsulates the fears and hopes of how mass literacy affects society. Some surmised that an increase in education would necessarily lead to an increase in rebellious activity, threatening England's political stability. Others assumed the opposite, viewing education as a tool that would protect England's political stability. While the former was the majority opinion at the beginning of the century, as the century progressed so too did the notion that education was a vital component of a democratic

society. This shift occurred in part due to changes in the voting constituency and in part due to rapid technological innovation that altered the workings of England's capitalistic economy.

Education and Jacobinism were correlated during the early and mid-Victorian era, an effect of the French Revolution. English Jacobinism was not identical to French Jacobinism, most notably by not calling for the execution of all who opposed Jacobin ideals (Thompson 100). In England, it was a movement most popular with artisans and intellectuals who believed in absolute democracy, which meant taking positions against the monarchy, the aristocracy, taxation, and even the State itself (Thompson 157). Members of this underground movement were linked to late 18th century insurrections in Scotland, Ireland, and even an English naval mutiny (Thompson 167). Despite these agitations, historian E.P. Thompson argues that by 1799, Jacobinism had ceased to be a national threat due to the execution of the movement's leader, the outlawing of Jacobinist groups, and because their goals were unpopular with the majority of Englishmen (174). Nevertheless, the perceived danger of Jacobin ideals persisted in the national consciousness, and education for the lower classes was viewed as the surest means of fomenting seditious feelings. Indeed, the 500% increase in crime between 1800-1840—a phenomenon detailed in Chapter 3— was at the time blamed on increasing literacy rates (Brantlinger, *Reading* 75). Nor was the notion that education led to sedition confined to England; in France, the 1848 revolutions were blamed on mass education (Butts 355).

The Great Reform Act of 1832, which focused on improving the structure of Parliamentary representation, also stoked fears of violence and disorder. First, it distributed seats in Parliament so that they more accurately reflected population density; formerly prosperous but now nearly deserted towns, known as "rotten boroughs," lost seats while booming industrial towns gained seats. It also extended the franchise to middle-class men by altering the property



requirement so that outright ownership was not necessary so long as the man had "the ability to rent land or a home worth L10" (Steinbach 40). Although the Great Reform Act doubled the number of eligible voters, the franchise was still limited to just 7% of the adult population (Steinbach 40). Even so, it "looked to many observers like the British version of the storming of the Bastille" (Brantlinger *Spirit* 8). These newly minted voters were of unknown quality; they had the ability to vote in Jacobin sympathizers who would subsequently dismantle the heretofore stable English political institutions.

While strong arguments were made that mass education was detrimental to English society, some members of the upper classes began valuing universal education as a means of buttressing submission to the stratified class system, with greater faith placed in literacy's ability to improve the lower class's morals and reinforce class-based duties that would prevent England from succumbing to the revolutionary spirit still lingering on the continent. In 1838, statistician George Porter alludes to this changing opinion by noting that, though there were ideological differences concerning the means of achieving an educated populace, "The principle is recognized that the people must be instructed. There is no longer any party found to question this principle, or to oppose its practical application" (Porter 684). Even so, he addresses objections to universal education, including the perceived audacity of working-class movements, such as the Luddites<sup>4</sup>. Porter assures the reader that the purpose of education is to help the lower class "see truths." He argues the revolts against machinery displacing unskilled labor are unwarranted; if the workers were educated, they would see that machines improve material conditions and

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<sup>4</sup> The Luddites were textile workers who protested technologies threatening their livelihoods by destroying machines installed in factories.

increase demand for labor (682-683). In so doing, Porter argues that an educated populace is a rational and docile populace.

Evangelicals had a significant stake in encouraging literacy among the populace due to their doctrines of salvation, which relied on direct revelation from God to the individual and required every individual to read the Bible for himself (Altick *Common* 99). This gave rise to the Sunday School movement, which according to Laqueur was “intended to educate the children of those who could not, or would not, provide education themselves,” meaning, of course, members of the lower class (Laqueur 86-87). Though some Sunday schools did provide limited instruction in elementary subjects, the curriculum consisted mainly of lessons in Christian morality. In fact, some Sunday schools eschewed academics entirely on the grounds that such knowledge was too dangerous to share with the lower class (Laqueur). Williams interprets this relatively lax view of academics as an indication of the Sunday schools' objective of accomplishing “the moral rescue as opposed to the moral instruction of the poor” (Williams 135). E.P. Thompson censures Sunday schools more forcefully than Williams, claiming that inadequate as the 18<sup>th</sup>-century provision of education for the poor had been, it “was nevertheless provision *for education*,” as opposed to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century in which “the function of education began and ended with the 'moral rescue' of the children of the poor. Not only was the teaching of writing discouraged, but very many Sunday school scholars left the schools unable to read” (Thompson 377). While literacy was an important component of Evangelicalism, there was not a consensus regarding the propriety of arming the lower class with the ability to read. Essentially, Evangelicals faced the question: What should be saved—souls or the State?

Literacy, then, was a double-edged sword, for it allowed choice. Although 18<sup>th</sup>-century Evangelicals such as Hannah More believed in the power of literacy to instill senses of duty and

morality, others feared newly literate masses would choose to read texts of sedition, rebellion, or even atheism instead (Altick *Common* 144). With literacy, one could read the “morally uplifting” novels and tracts distributed enthusiastically by adherents to evangelical sects (Brantlinger *Spirit* 24). One could also, however, choose to read “degrading” materials as well (Altick *Common* 108). This put Evangelical education advocates in a pickle; from their perspective, members of the lower-class needed literacy in order to be saved, but teaching reading smacked of Jacobism. Education advocates insisted they could eliminate the paradox of choice by teaching the lower orders to read only the Bible and discourage interest in “entertaining books” (Altick *Common* 144). Much of the history of Victorian education reform centers around the need to control lower-class literacy, imparting enough for them to be useful to the higher classes but not so much as to place those higher classes in danger.

The constraints of this binary also illustrate the central question of Victorian education reform: What, precisely, does literacy *do*? The importance of this question shifts the focus from the sociocultural/material analysis commonly applied to education systems. Instead, the practical function of literacy emphasizes the role language practices play in the hopes and fears surrounding mass education. James Paul Gee’s theories about literacy as a means of maintaining class boundaries reflect ideas present, if not explicitly expressed, at the time. Gee dedicates *Social Linguistics and Literacies* to the examination of how language practices are indelibly bound to social power and ideologies. He argues that because languages are a social possession in which meaning and form are not obviously connected, those not ‘properly’ socialized at a young age will be marked as “outsiders” due to their inability to “fully master these intricacies” (78). For this reason, middle-class children raised in homes familiar with the conventions of schooling will seem to be “smarter” in the classroom than children who did not have this

advantage (79). Expanding on this notion of language practices as gatekeepers to middle-class acceptability, Gee states that language practices are motivated by desire for *status* and *solidarity*, or the quest for both respect and community (104). The assumption is that the means of gaining status and solidarity is through acquiring middle class language practices, thereby gaining respect (for speaking in the socially-recognized way) and community (within the respected middle-class).

The manner in which teacher training manuals instruct teachers on proper reading exemplifies this assumption in the Victorian era. One benchmark of “correct reading” is “purity of pronunciation” (Gill 149; Park 18). What exactly does purity of pronunciation entail? John Gill, author of *Introductory Text-Book to School Education, Method, and School Management*, simply defines it as “giving to each letter its right sound, and to each word its proper accent” (149). Accent, he claims, “is a fault, sometimes of habit, generally of ignorance. Its source is to be sought in the difference between the language of books and that of the common people. Much of this language is strange to the ear, and hence is so to their intelligence” (Gill 156). In *School Management and Method in Theory and Practice* John Prince, perhaps more honestly, notes that accurate pronunciation “is the usage of that pronunciation which is sanctioned by custom, being that which good education, regulated by the decisions of learning and taste, dictates” (88). In other words, proper pronunciation is that which the educated classes prefer it to be. The authors explain that the students are exposed to language primarily in their homes and the streets, where they are learning English from the ignorant (Park 45; Gill 87, 156). Of particular concern are unspecified “provincialisms” and the aspirated *h*<sup>5</sup> (Prince 87; Gill 155; Park 18). These

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<sup>5</sup> In English, the aspirated *h* refers to dropping the first *h* sound in a word. For example, in Received Pronunciation (the “standard” British accent, one would say, “Hello. How is Harry?” With the aspirated *h*, the sentence becomes, “'ello. 'ow is 'arry?”

educationists suggested that the perceived deficiencies in their students' pronunciation were caused by their home lives.

These excerpts both support and complicate the usefulness of indoctrinating all students into middle-class language practices. Because language demarcates class boundaries, there remains a vested interest in maintaining this separation. To successfully change the language practices of the lower class ushers in the possibility of elevating their status and solidarity, collapsing the carefully preserved distinctions that allowed the middle class to feel superior to the lower class.<sup>6</sup> Yet teachers are specifically instructed to elevate the speech of lower-class students, imparting to them linguistic capital previously reserved for the upper classes. Notably, these training manuals were published in the 1880s, after the passage of the Reform Act of 1867, which again doubled the franchise, this time by allowing the “respectable working man” to vote even if he did not own property. During the 1860s, as the passage of the Second Reform Act became inevitable, opponents to education reform began to soften their stance that mass education threatened England's national existence. In fact, education became the *preserver* of England's existence by preparing the newly franchised lower class for their democratic duties. This attitude has been most famously reflected in the 1867 declaration of Robert Lowe, then serving as Vice-President of the Committee of the Council on Education, that “ ‘our masters’ should be at once educated; not for their benefit, but lest they should become an intractable

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<sup>6</sup> Though outside the scope of this discussion, it must be noted this is a paternalistic assumption, presuming the middle-class is in fact the social group most worthy of emulation. A history of lower-class resistance to these ideals exists because to achieve status and solidarity with the middle class is to eschew their own identities. I turn to a *Punch* cartoon from the 1880s. A well-dressed gentleman leans over a fence to speak to a shabbily dressed farmer. The gentleman inquires why the farmer has pulled his son from the public school. The farmer says the teacher is unfit for the job— “He wanted to teach my boy to spell ‘taters’ with a ‘P’!!!” Though the butt of the joke is the ignorant farmer, it recognizes an existing refusal to enter into solidarity with the middle-class.

democracy, and endanger the interests of the upper and middle classes” (“Inopportune Popular Education”)<sup>7</sup>. By referring to the newly franchised members of the lower class as “masters,” Lowe plays upon the upper-class fear that the lower class would usurp their ‘natural right’ to govern. Many expressed concerns that an “uneducated” segment of the population would vote for the ‘wrong’ candidates. As far back as 1837, not long after the passing of the First Reform Bill, one Mr. G.A. Fleming asserted at a town meeting, “If the people of Salford had all received such an education, and had thus been enabled to fulfil their duties as citizens and father [sic], the cry would not have resounded through their streets at the last election, from intoxicated lips, of ‘Garnett for ever’”<sup>8</sup> (“Salford Town Meeting”). To many, including Lowe, this newly granted freedom for the lower class seemed less an enlargement of British democracy than the creation of a lower-class dictatorship enforced by mob rule.

This indicates a significant shift in the discourse of education reform. Though the educated masses threaten social stability through linguistic equality, inequality simultaneously threatens political stability. Though sociolinguists deny a correlation between language practices and rationality, the rhetoric regarding the relationship between education and the franchise implies that middle and upper-class Victorians did equate particular speech practices with sound judgment. In 1866, one Mr. Grant Duff cited the fine line between mob rule and “the perfect

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<sup>7</sup> This is often misquoted as, “We must educate our masters.”

<sup>8</sup> Although I have been unable to determine exactly who this particular “Garnett” is, the article goes on to explain Mr. Fleming had recently solicited Garnett for funds for a local mechanics’ institute and had been rebuffed.

government,” the difference being education, presumably because the educated man is a man of reason. Though the beginning of the century tied education and revolution together, as the continental revolutions occurred, the English began advocating for education as an abeyance, and the rhetoric began to focus on a culture of educated anti-violence.

To many Victorians, a peaceful society was a literate society. In addition to the importance of literacy for social and political institutions, it was increasingly important for England's economy. Despite booms and slumps, the economy expanded by an average of 3% every year, cementing England as the richest nation in the world (Steinbach 88). Having reached this position, the English wanted to stay there, and many began to push education as a way of keeping England on top of global competition economically, politically, and socially. In 1856, newly elected M.P. and future Prime Minister Lord Cecil asserted, “In an age when national greatness depends, not on numbers or on territory, but on intelligence, the development of intelligence is a duty the neglect of which will hazard our national position” (“Lord Robert Cecil”). At a distribution of exam prizes in 1867, the former Vice-President of the Committee of Council on Education H.A. Bruce announced, “the question had been asked whether the education given to the poorer classes, and indeed to all classes, was sufficient not only to enable them to do their duty as Christian citizens, but to enable the country to hold the proud place it had hitherto occupied among the nations of the world” (“The Right Hon”). Here Bruce references the changing economy, which had greatly expanded in part due to the banking system providing short-term credit to businessmen and industrialists, increasing their ability to expand their businesses, while also boosting the contributions of the financial sector in creating wealth (Steinbach 82). Improved transportation over both land and sea expanded existing economic sectors and created new ones.

As the economy became more specialized, demand for services—not just domestic servants but also clergy, doctors, funeral directors, and retailers—increased (Steinbach 84). Therefore, more jobs were beginning to require elementary skills, and more attention was given to the inferiority of uneducated labor. Sometimes comparisons were made to slave labor, as seen in an article from the *Daily News*, which reported on M.P. Milnes’ assertion “that slave cultivated land was the worst cultivated land in the world, and remarked that what he deduced from this was, that if instead of slave labour they employed free and intelligent workmen, the more intelligent and educated they made these workmen the better for both them and their employers” (“Mr. Milnes”). Comparisons between the uneducated lower class and animals were even more common. For example, a *Lloyd's Weekly* editorial from 1869 stated, “The labour of the hands of Ignorance is not much removed above that of the horse or ox” (“Compulsory Education”). Interestingly, these journalists and politicians do not explain *how* education raises the quality of economic productivity, assuming—as many rhetorical strategies do—that the cause and effect are obvious. However, historian Robert Altick clarifies that educated workers “increased production, reduced waste, assured more intelligent handling of machinery, even increased the possibility of a workman's hitting upon some money saving short-cut” (Altick *Common* 143). In *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis have found a correlation between demand for education and growth of capitalistic economies, so its appearance here is not surprising.

In 1847, Clergyman John Dufton claimed that the importance of the education question “cannot possibly be overrated. On its right solution depends the future prosperity, the future stability, and almost the future existence of the British empire. Moral and intellectual superiority, rather than a superiority in physical resources, or in physical strength, has placed our country in



the first rank of the scale of nations” (1). The early Victorian era feared revolution, and by the 1860s, that revolution had come. Far from the violent overthrow of a sitting government that destroyed national unity, however, the revolution had come slowly, through incremental political reform and rapid technological advancement. One can debate whether literacy can in fact be blamed for the revolutions of 1848, but mid-century England, poised as the greatest power on Earth, decided that only an educated populace could preserve the nation.

### **Capitalism**

Even with general agreement by mid-century that mass education was desirable for preserving England, a commitment to *laissez-faire* capitalism and ideals of “liberty” stymied the education reform movements’ goal of free, compulsory education for all English children. Education historian Auerbach notes that many who opposed compulsory schooling did so over concerns regarding the loss of liberty that state intervention posed to private life (759) and the subsequent violation of “the sanctity of the home, a locale whose independence from outside interference was considered by many among the middle class to be a cornerstone of the English concept of liberty” (774). In an 1862 letter to the editor of the *Daily News* about compulsory education, one W.L. Clay opined, “the great objection, after all, is this, that compulsory education is un-English.” While there was growing support for the idea that education was a public good, it was not at all accepted that the public should therefore require it.

In addition to abridging liberty, government intervention defied the principles of *laissez-faire* capitalism that viewed the preservation of free trade and private competition as the government's sole purview (Guttek 174). In fact, Adam Smith was directly invoked to support the position that private enterprise could best educate the nation's children. In 1849, the *Daily News*

reported that during a public meeting about education policy, the Reverend Dr. Halley insisted that education “ought to be carried on upon the principle of competition, and Adam Smith's doctrine, that the schoolmaster must depend upon the payment of his pupils and not upon the public for support, he held to be the true foundation of excellence in secular education” (“Voluntary Education”). In that same meeting, Edward Baines, a future Member of Parliament for the Liberal party, similarly argued that “The true means of obtaining universal education for the people was to leave it to perfect freedom for all their energies, to leave it to individual competition” (“Voluntary Education”). The refrain that competition produced the best results echoed through the decades. At a ceremony awarding prizes to the top performers on standardized exams, Conservative politician Sir Stafford Northcote pronounced, “I am quite sure that the system of competition and self-reliance which prevails so much now happily amongst us, which pervades so much our political and commercial systems must be applied boldly to our education system if we are to carry this matter properly into effect” (“Sir S. Northcote”). Robert Lowe firmly believed that teachers should be paid wages that reflected their market value rather than a set salary paid from endowments (“Mr. Robert Lowe”; Lake) on the assumption that schools should and could be subject to the same market pressures as other professions (Sylvester 72). To distort the market was anathema to many Victorian leaders, and that adherence to a capitalistic ideology indelibly shaped the rhetoric of education reform throughout the century.

This commitment to *laissez-faire* capitalism was reinforced in the influence of evangelicalism and utilitarianism, which Altick has deemed the “two most potent influences upon the social and cultural tone of nineteenth-century England” (Altick *Common* 99). At first glance, this may seem contradictory. After all, evangelicalism is a spiritual movement focused on saving souls so that one may enjoy eternity in Heaven after death, while utilitarianism is a

worldly philosophy advocating that right and wrong can be reduced to that which brings the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. Yet their convergences are strong. Evangelicalism and utilitarianism both shared the belief that “Happiness could be earned only through sustained labor and the sacrifice of immediate pleasure” (Altick *Victorian* 169). Through this lens, “poverty was, almost by definition, the consequence of laziness and spendthrift habits” (Altick *Victorian* 171). According to Altick, “Work, in a secular context, was the counterpart of faith in a religious one, and its efficacy too was regarded as an infallible doctrine” (Altick *Victorian* 168). The mission of education thus became “to set in motion within the hearts and minds of working people a particular process of self-improvement, or—what was just as beneficial- a feeling of their need to be improved according to others’ standards” (Altick *Common* 64). This is, in fact, the Victorian version of the boot-strap myth, advancing the notion that anyone can raise themselves out of poverty through hard work.

Many educationists advocated for education because it would teach students to value “hard work” as the primary means of success and happiness. At the groundbreaking of a new school in 1855, the Dean of Hereford promoted education because “Education taught a man the necessity of labour” (“Dean of Hereford”). This “spirit of work,” usually referred to as diligence, permeates teacher training manuals. For example, Gill states, “The spirit of work must be infused into every part of the school...All temptation to idleness must be prevented” (53). This emphasis on industry is valued in part as a classroom management technique. Prince commands, “See that every one of your scholars has *always* something to do. Some, being much quicker than others in performing their work, must have something definite to do when they have finished their ordinary task” (39-40). In the context of the classroom, then, industry is deemed desirable as a

means of controlling many students while simultaneously preparing students to conform to the expectation of living an active, productive adulthood.

Teachers also prepare students to enter the labor market through adherence to schedules. Each manual insists on the posting of a schedule, which delineates precisely what should be done at what time and from which there are no deviations. The time table is an opportunity to provide “a practical lesson on obedience” as well as “the value of time and punctuality” as the students observe how strictly the teacher adheres to it (Prince 19); Gill also explains how the time table promotes order and industry because “a given work having to be done in a given time, both teachers and children become anxious to avoid waste of time, everything necessary to the work in hand is in its place, and a strong motive exists to bend the entire energies to the allotted task” (77). Gill and Prince believe so strongly in the importance of punctuality in forming character, they advocate the keeping of a Lost-Time Book. In this book, the teacher records every student's tardiness. At “fixed periods,” the teacher would provide each parent with a reckoning each instance of tardiness and the minutes of instructional time therefore missed, reported in a chiding tone. Prince refers to lack of punctuality as an “evil” that will warp the student's character (45) and Gill exhorts teachers to remind parents that “such a habit cannot but be injurious to the child's character and progress” (62).

Capitalism cannot be untangled from Victorian education because it infused every aspect of schooling. Free, compulsory schooling for every child was not achieved until 1891 because such a system defies the free market principles upon which much of the English economy relied. The incremental steps toward systemic education occurred in reaction to political-cultural shifts, which seemed to necessitate expanding educational opportunities to support its capitalistic economy. These values in turn infused the school, influencing not only the curriculum but also—

or especially—the disciplinary frameworks within the school day. These values also structured class relations because, as Bowles and Gintis posit, capitalism is not merely an economic system but also a social system that schools will, inevitably, replicate.

### **Social Stratification/Class Struggle**

Unlike American capitalism, the stated goal of Victorian capitalism was not to raise one's economic status. Analyzing Victorian rhetoric reveals an acute awareness of the need for a wide lower class serving as the base of both the economic and social pyramids. As the following chapters will show, the rhetoric of Victorian education reform offered no pretense that the school should help students improve their socioeconomic status; to the contrary, a prevailing concern was the possibility of overeducating the lower class. One must understand the carefully constructed system of class relations in order to appreciate the culture the Victorian schools were expected to replicate.

Although Victorians sometimes applied fine distinctions among classes, such as lower-upper-middle class, these were amalgamations of the three main class groups: upper, lower, and middle. In its simplest form, Victorian society can be classified into the working class who earned wages by the hour or day, the middle class who earned salaries or profits, and the upper class who obtained income by means other than employment, such as rent or interest (Steinbach 115). Class distinctions transcended mere income, of course, as the cultural hierarchy played an important role in Victorian conceptions of class. For example, Protestants, particularly Anglicans, held more cachet than Catholics and members of non-Christian religions. Of particular interest for this project, members of the lower class could distinguish themselves as “respectable” by demonstrating cleanliness and “character,” thus placing them above the “rough” working class, a

distinction the middle class tended to characterize as the “deserving” poor and “undeserving” poor (Steinbach 119). The somewhat porous nature of class demarcations balanced a very real need to preserve a large lower-class that would perform the manual labor necessary for a capitalistic society with the mechanism for diminishing the negative elements associated with the lower class, namely crime and disease. Social acceptability resided on one's moral rather than economic status.

Matthew Arnold illustrated the complexity of class relations in 1869's *Culture and Anarchy*. Arnold divides, or rather renames, the English social hierarchy into Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace. He compares the aristocracy to Barbarians because of their preference for “exterior graces and achievements” rather than internal, spiritual improvement. He likens the middle class to Philistines, on account of their preoccupation with industry and achievement. The Populace he envisions as the worst fear of the higher classes: “raw and half-developed,” living in “poverty and squalor,” and now emboldened to begin “marching where it likes, meeting where it likes, bawling what it likes, breaking what it likes.” Arnold criticizes the Philistines for being too contented with becoming one's “ordinary self” and material gains rather than rising to a more spiritual “best self,” while he scorns the Populace for their penchant toward violence and destruction.

Though Arnold explicitly applies these labels according to class boundaries, he immediately collapses the boundaries. First, he notes that “there is a common basis of human nature” such that everyone has at least some Barbarian, Philistine, and Populace in him. Secondly, and more interestingly, Arnold displays a reluctance to treat economic status as destiny. He considers productive members of the working class “one in spirit with the industrial middle-class” who may thereby “be numbered by us among the Philistines.” Class, then, has as

much to do with morals and behaviors as it does income and assets. Arnold showcases a special relationship between the middle and working classes, observing, “It is notorious that our middle-class liberals have long looked forward to this consummation, when the working-class shall join forces with them, aid them heartily to carry forward their great works, go in a body to their tea-meetings, and, in short, enable them to bring about their millennium.” Despite Arnold's acerbity, he expresses a real middle-class interest in raising the moral code of the lower class for religious and philanthropic purposes, though not for any sort of economic conciliation. Arnold alludes to the ability of a working-class man to become a symbolic member of the middle class through adherence to specific virtues, but he must remain in fact a function of the economic system for the sake of social stability. Indeed, Patrick Brantlinger contends that the popularity of Victorian era fictional realism rose in part because of its “reification of the social status quo, notably involving...the themes of resignation and class reconciliation” in which a working-class character “learns to accept his station in life (that is, his position in society) as inevitable, natural, or God-given” (96).

These class relations were facilitated by notions of right feeling and right action. Each class had specific economic and moral obligations to not only perform but perform willingly and contentedly. Right action first entailed obtaining jobs befitting their “station in life:” investment and property for the upper class, the professions and civil service for the middle class, and manual labor for the lower class. One was not to aspire to rise above one's station “but to find happiness at the level at which they found themselves” (Steinbach 115). The moral person, therefore, conformed to class-based relations “cheerfully.”

The principle that children should recognize obedience as a means of fulfilling one's duty illustrates the relationship between right action and right feeling—and how right feeling was the

center of Victorian morality. Because of the belief that right feeling led to right action, duty involved showing deference to those stationed above and sympathy to those stationed below. Altick argues that deference, or the “willing acknowledgement that the people in the classes above one's own were justly entitled to their superiority,” had been so deeply ingrained across centuries that England avoided the revolutions seen in the rest of Europe (*Victorians* 18). In return for receiving deference, the social contract dictated that those in higher stations would express sympathy for those in lower stations. Relations between the middle and lower class epitomize deference and sympathy in action. For example, the majority of the middle class believed the poor created their own poverty through weakness of character. Yet sympathy moved them to assist the lower class “by bringing middle-class values of respectability, domesticity, and often evangelical Christianity, to the less fortunate” (Steinbach 127). In exchange, the beneficiaries of this philanthropy were expected to show deference by adopting those middle-class values and “living thriftily” (Steinbach 127).

School novels of this era concretely depict the principles of sympathy and deference, with aristocratic Public Schools explicitly illustrating to the reader how this structure reinforces the cultural need to develop sympathy toward the lower class. The narrator of *Schoolboy Honour*, for example, explains that “many a boy who would otherwise have passed his whole life without once realizing to himself what bodily privation and hardship really were, has been taught to sympathize with the great masses of suffering humanity, and learned the noblest lessons of fortitude and self-support, by having been subject in his school-boy days to the lawless and capricious cruelty of his boy-master” (41). The narrator of *The Thing that Hath Been* also takes up this theme, noting, “A public school is not only a place where boys say lessons, it is also a place where they associate together, forming a society, and being trained to play the part of



gentlemen of good position in the world. They learn, of course, the ordinary virtues of a man, and they learn also the virtues which belong especially to their class, and the right bearing towards the lower orders” (Gilkes 245-246). One aspect of the pedagogy of the upper class schools, then, is to instill sympathy toward the lower classes so that students, essentially, become good masters; the pedagogy of the lower-class schools is to instill respect for the upper classes so they become good workers. When Jane Eyre swears she would not put up with her teacher's criticisms in the graceful way in which her friend Helen does, Helen replies, “Yet it would be your duty to bear it, if you could not avoid it: it is weak and silly to say you *cannot bear* what it is your fate to be required to bear” (Brontë 65). Jane's social duty as the student of a charity school is subservience: to shoulder work and hardships without complaint.

These values are also reflected in teacher training manuals that exhorted teachers to show sympathy to their students. Park warns teachers against using threats or “names against students” (11). Gill implores teachers to “always *respect their feelings*—not blunt them with sneers, ridicule, and contempt at any time,” and to keep in mind that “some children are much more sensitive than others” (88). He ends this section by warning, “Violence ever defeats its own purpose. A teacher should never bluster, never bully, never scold” (Gill 88). The teacher having expressed sympathy with the students and treated them with respect, it was assumed the students would internalize lessons about obedience and duty. Indeed, Gill claims that “Moral instruction is imperfect which does not secure the application by the conscience to personal duty” (26). He considers school a microcosm of society at large, a place in which one learns obedience not through mere rule following “but by implanting a general rule or principle of conduct, that most good will be effected; *e.g.*, the sense of justice, if implanted in children, would exclude the necessity of prohibiting what would be a violation of it” because these habits “are alike

necessary to their own happiness and to the well-being of society” (Gill 94). One's duty, then, is to perform right action to one's fellow man, and this right action must stem from right feeling.

Just as Evangelicals faced a paradox in teaching reading in order to elevate man's consciousness without also raising his economic ire, so too did a broader range of middle-class stakeholders. According to the higher classes, the lower class needed moral and intellectual elevation in order to best serve the middle and upper classes, but that same education might make them “overqualified” for or unwilling to perform the labor required of them. In public conversations about education, class-focused curriculums became the tool that, in Goldilocks fashion, could bestow just the right amount of education. An 1839 report published by the Poor Law Commissioners advocated for universal education by asking how the inhabitants of workhouses can decrease their dependency on government aid “if no exertion were made to prepare them to earn their livelihood by skilful labour, and to fit them to discharge their social duties by training them in correct moral habits, and giving them knowledge suited to their station in life” (Kay 8). Kay neatly emphasizes the twin coins of right feeling—being trained in moral habits and right action—preparing for the labor market. Significantly, he emphasizes that the knowledge must be specifically suited to the child's “station in life.” This reflects the tacit belief that to provide general knowledge risks upending the social structure dependent upon a wide lower-class base. In the ensuing years, concerns about overeducating the populace became more pronounced, reaching their peak in the 1850s. In 1857, future Prime Minister Lord Salisbury lamented that ideas about education for the lower class had become too “lofty” because “it should, in fact, be productive of solid and tangible advantage” (“Labour, Education, and the Poor”). That same year the *Morning Post* published an editorial proclaiming that each “sphere of life” requires specific types of knowledge unnecessary in other spheres, and so “The trite proverb

is therefore only partially true; and 'knowledge is power' only when the right knowledge is in the right person at the right time" ("An education"). The editorial proceeds to argue that future servants should have training schools devoted solely to teaching domestic skills, illustrating this need with reference to female servants who "write and receive letters by the bushel, and eagerly devour novels purchased in pennyworths" but are unable to mend clothing ("An education"). Equally unsatisfying, however, are middle-class members unable to read, write, and calculate at the necessary level to enter the professions. Thus, as the *Daily News* argued in 1855 that they should get "such an amount of education as would qualify them to be entered at the proper age into the employment of government, or other masters, where they would be trained to be skilled workmen" ("A Step"). By mid-century, the tension that began as a conflict between education and possible revolution intensified. An educated populace had become necessary as the realm of the common man's duties had widened. This widening of duties supported the upper classes, but the required increase in education threatened to lead to social mobility and a smaller working class. Because that violated the right feeling/right action basis of morality, over-education was arguably immoral.

Ironically, teachers themselves were castigated in general society for becoming "overeducated" and rising above their birth station. Prejudice against teachers ran strong during the 1800s. In the first part of the century, it was a profession often "taken up by those too old, too sick or too inefficient to earn their living in any other way," at least partly because wages were much lower than even those paid to manual laborers (Horn 163). As schools became more organized and accountable to Parliament, the profession entered a liminal status. Technically, teaching was a middle-class profession as it did not require manual labor and earned a salary. However, it drew suspicion from the 'proper' middle-class as most teachers had been born into

the lower class and used their education as a means of social advancement. Teacher training colleges were particularly controversial because they looked, to some members of the middle-class, like state subsidies for crossing “the natural lines of class division” (Roach 49). Teaching, then, was looked down upon and those entering the profession were often derided as “pretentious” (Roach 49) for defying the social norm that dictated against raising one's class status.

Bowles and Gintis argue that schools reinforce economic inequality by perpetuating the social relationships required for a functioning capitalistic system. The previous examples from fictional and actual schools, as well as newspaper accounts, bear out this conclusion. Not all arguments about the *purpose* of education were made in direct support of the capitalist economy, but all the arguments about the *curriculum* focused entirely on what Bowles and Gintis label 'integration into adult society,' or the labor force. Even so, England largely avoided the central conflict of American movements identified by Bowles and Gintis: personal development vs. capitalists' needs. Instead, the Victorian era agonized over the minimum amount of knowledge lower-class workers required. Though a few stakeholders did discuss education as a right unto itself or a means of self-actualization, these voices were fewer than those heard in the United States. By the late years of the Victorian era, mass education was viewed as one way of ensuring the working class remained separate from, but in sync with, the middle class and aristocracy. Stein argues that education bills were merely “a way of improving the lot of the masses” but also insured “that they would not continue to exist outside the boundaries of authority” (174). In fact, by mid-century the argument became that every child received an education; compulsory schooling would allow the middle and upper classes to control that education, rather than leaving it to the influences of the streets. An 1850 *Lloyd's Weekly* editorial argued “that the population

are educated whether they will or no. If they are not educated for good, they are for evil—if they are not trained for a career of honest industry, they are for one of vice and crime” (“National Education”). Public elementary schools, then, were a means of regulating the lower class, ensuring economic and social stability through the inculcation of duty and deference.

### **Conclusion**

Education reform efforts in Victorian England focused primarily on the lower class and were driven by a particular social theory of poverty. The national conversation was heavily influenced by the generalizations made about the lower class: the poor were unindustrious, idle, and prone to unrest and rabble-rousing without the moral influence of the middle class. As the lower class began gaining political power through the Reform Acts and the economy shifted from one of agriculture to one of commerce, it became necessary to formalize the delivery of the culture's social tenets. The mission of the school was to move the lower class toward a middle-class morality without equalizing their status. These social, political, and economic struggles reveal an inescapable tension in Victorian education reform. Clear class boundaries needed to remain in order to preserve domestic tranquility and serve capitalistic ends. At the same time, the lower class needed to achieve moral and intellectual equality with the upper and middle classes in order to advance England's economic and political interests.

Because the perceived consequences of a failing school system are so dire, conversations about education reform tend to stir up a frenetic energy that needs to “do something.” Historian James Bowen wrote in 1981:

Throughout Western history, in every epoch, there has been a rush of ideas that threatened the stability of the existing social order, and ... our heritage is one of continued challenge and, generally, resolution. At present, however, it does seem that events may overwhelm us before conceptual clarity can be achieved and

appropriate responses determined, and that situation should be of central concern to the education historian. (xvii)

His observation regarding the overwhelming rush of ideas has only become truer in the intervening thirty years. Rhetorical analysis is one means of gaining the “conceptual clarity” needed to enact meaningful change. Examining the rhetorical construction of key facets of Victorian education pushes against the myth of the failing school by demonstrating that failure is not an objective occurrence but a rhetorical construction to achieve specific social ends. While there may be a tacit consciousness in the general public of the role rhetorical strategies play in education reform debates—both past and present—making their effects explicit clarifies what is right and wrong with the school system...and therefore society at large.

### CHAPTER 3. SETTING EXPECTATIONS

George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is partly a tale of education, in which the son of a miller is sent to a preparatory school in order to enter the business world. Unfortunately, school-life ill fits Tom, whose powers of perception are more aptly used in outdoor pursuits than Latin declensions. The narrator confides that "Whence Mr. Stelling concluded that Tom's brain, being peculiarly impervious to etymology and demonstrations, was peculiarly in need of being ploughed and harrowed by these patent implements; it was his favorite metaphor, that the classics and geometry constituted that culture of the mind which prepared it for the reception of any subsequent crop" (Eliot 147). In thinking about his students, then, Mr. Stelling pictures them as a fallow field, which he needs to farm. While certainly an efficient metaphor, the narrator hesitates to endorse it, supposing that "if we are to have one regimen for all minds, his seems to me as good as any other. I only know it turned out as uncomfortably for Tom Tulliver as if he had been plied with cheese in order to remedy a gastric weakness which prevented him from digesting it" (Eliot 147). The narrator goes on to ponder the power of metaphor, observing, "Once call the brain an intellectual stomach, and one's ingenious conception of the classics and geometry as ploughs and harrows seems to settle nothing. But then it is open to some one else to follow great authorities, and call the mind a sheet of white paper or a mirror, in which case one's knowledge of the digestive process becomes quite irrelevant" (Eliot 147). In this section, Eliot enacts the metaphor criticism described by Lakoff and Johnson. If the brain is a field to be ploughed, one approaches teaching much differently than if the brain is a stomach to be filled or a piece of paper to inscribe. The metaphor shapes the relationship between teacher and student and creates specific expectations of the student's response to instruction.

This chapter explores the rhetorical construction of “the school” as a social idea in order to understand how middle- and upper-class stakeholders set the problem of a Victorian public school system. This approach facilitates candid comparisons between the expressed purpose of a centralized education and the curriculum later implemented by the Committee Council on Education, which is analyzed in Chapter 4. I use metaphor analysis to identify the primary purposes laid out during the education debate. In order to conduct this analysis, I read approximately two hundred transcripts, letters to the editor, and reports about education published in London newspapers between 1830 and 1869 that contained <education> in the text, taking note of metaphors concerning English education and schooling.

The metaphor analysis revealed that three conceptual metaphors dominated the education debate: <ignorance is a disease>, <education is bread>, and <students are fields>. These metaphors link education with issues of great concern in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—a perceived explosion in crime rates, increased attention to public health measures as a means of curtailing devastating epidemics, the reinforcement of self-reliance and the importance of work to human happiness, and investment in England’s economic and political future. They also contain implicit arguments about the controversial mechanisms of implementing a centralized school system<sup>9</sup>, such as funding and compulsory attendance.

### **Ignorance Is a Disease**

The most prominent trope used in the public debate was that of <disease>, specifically the conceptual metaphor, <ignorance is a disease>. For example, reformer John Dufton wrote in

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<sup>9</sup> While there were many efforts to improve the education of the masses, such as The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, this project focuses on school as an institution.



1847, “Ignorance, like lunacy, is a disease of which the patient himself is totally unconscious” (Dufton 24). Most of the time, the writer made a direct link between the notion of <ignorance is a disease> and the ways in which the government had recently intervened in matters of public health. In an 1853 letter to the editor, prolific correspondent John Watts wrote, “In sanitary matters we do not hesitate to act when an epidemic threatens us; we bustle as if for our lives when a house is on fire. Why should we allow moral fungi to exist on every side of us, and never lift our hands except to add to the sufferings of its victims by punishment?” (“Must Education”). A few years later, one M.T.W wrote to the *Morning Post* that public health laws “even require parents to vaccinate their children—this for the sake of the children themselves, and for that of others, in order that they may not be the means of spreading pestilence in after years. This being the case, how can it be argued that our laws are as they should be, when they altogether ignore the more important part of the child, the mind?”

The power of comparing ignorance to a disease stems from the very real physical diseases, particularly cholera, that ravaged England with deadly outbreaks every decade between 1830 and 1860 (Steinbach 16). The death rate was particularly high in the lower class because these epidemics “joined with diseases induced by malnutrition, exhaustion, and 'vice' (a conveniently vague catchall term, with particularly strong connotations of alcoholism and illicit sex) to further increase the death rate” in the lower-class neighborhoods (Wilson V 45). Chadwick first drew attention to these depraved conditions in the 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population*, which called attention to the unsanitary conditions of the urban poor and advocated for “better drainage, sanitation, and water provisions” (Steinbach 21). The report prompted many Victorians to believe the government should take responsibility for public health issues, despite the general anti-government attitudes still prevailing. The first

step was the Public Health Act of 1848, with additional legislation passing in 1866, 1868 and 1875 that improved urban sanitation (Steinbach 22). Comparing ignorance to physical disease justifies government intervention in schooling on the same grounds as government intervention in public health.

Even more to the point, in many examples ignorance is linked with the social problems of vice and crime. Lord Brougham, a statesman and one of the earliest proponents of education reform, addressed a crowd of patrons of the Lamb and Flag Ragged School in 1847, commending them for supporting “one of the very best good works that is was possible for man to be engaged in, endeavouring to rescue from a state of ignorance—of helpless and hopeless ignorance, which was the parent of crime and vice, as well as of wretchedness” (“Education of the Poor”). At an 1849 meeting to discuss the propriety of secular education, T. Bazley, Esq asserted that “It was an undisputed maxim that ignorance was the parent of crime” (“Secular Education”). That meeting concluded with a resolution “that in order to diminish intemperance, misery, and crime, and to promote morality and the best interests of all classes, a public provision for the education of the people is necessary” (“Secular Education”). An 1867 editorial in *Lloyd's Weekly* claimed “that ignorance means poverty, and drunkenness, and crime; that it is the root of every social evil; that it makes the poor child a pauper, and the pauper a criminal—this is surely a terrible truth—that we are making a million of children inheritors of misery—that, with the deliberate wickedness, we are growing flights of jailbirds” (“Inopportune Popular Education”).

According to the newly birthed field of statistics, those “flights of jailbirds” were increasing exponentially. In the 1840s, England began panicking about a skyrocketing crime rate. By some estimates, crime had risen 700% (Steinbach 163). Statistician George Porter attributed

the rise to better policing and the relaxation of the Criminal Code, which had caused juries to acquit the guilty rather than impose too harsh, mandatory punishments (Porter 635). In the 1851 edition of *The Progress of the Nation in its various Social and Economical Relations, from the beginning of the Nineteenth Century to the present time*, Porter makes the case, in his chapters both on “Crime” and “Education,” that increasing access to education would decrease the seemingly unstoppable crime rate. In “Crime,” he published several charts that plot the educational attainment of jailed criminals between 1836 and 1848, which show an inversely proportional relationship between education and crime; the more education one had, the less likely one was to turn criminal.

Yet the supposition that increased education decreased crime had its detractors as well. In his study on Victorian fears of literacy, Patrick Brantlinger points out that some “radicals and conservatives interpreted the soaring crime rate as a function of education instead of the reverse” (Brantlinger *Reading* 74). Covering a lecture given by Reverend G.W. Conder at a meeting of Sunday school teachers in 1851, the *Daily News* reports

Education would not do everything. The plea drawn from the records of crime—the small number of educated persons on criminal calendars—for the forcible education of the people, did not seem to him to be logical. It was said, if the people be educated, crime would cease—that purgative doses of spelling, alterative mixture of geography, and tonic mixtures of arithmetic, would cure the diseases of society. He could not see the connexion between the premises and the conclusion. To effect a moral end, moral means must be employed. (“Conference of Friends”)

He further claims, “Without either religion or the rule of three, a man might be a pickpocket; without the former and with the latter, he might be a swindler; but with religion he could not be either” (“Conference of the Friends”).

Though Conder could be accused of arguing from self-preservation, the notion that education for education's sake was not a worthy goal ran rampant through Victorian society.

There was a strong notion that the problem was not general ignorance, but a specific type of moral ignorance. At an 1847 meeting of the London Diocesan Board of Education, the Bishop of London claimed, “Deprived of their parents or deserted by them, brought up in ignorance, destitute of the principle, incessantly exposed to temptation, these poor children inevitably strike upon the only path which appears open to them, and yield to force which impels them to crime” (“Diocesan Board”). Twenty years later, the Lord Russell advocated that “while they are young boys and girls at school, it ought to be sufficient for them to know what Christ has taught, what the Apostles have taught, and form those lessons and precepts to guide their conduct in life.” He illustrates this need through the story of a boy caught illegally setting traps for hares. According to the Bishop, the boy never heard of Jesus, implying that, were he edified by the Gospel, this boy would not have been setting illegal snares (“Earl Russell”).

Even so, Brantlinger, who himself deploys the disease metaphor, contends that “liberal faith in education as a panacea for all social problems ran strong, as it does today. The question was thus reformulated as one of moral or religious ignorance instead of illiteracy, and of improper or even criminal schooling instead of no schooling” (*Reading* 78). Indeed, schools were often viewed as places that could insulate susceptible children from the immoral influences of the street. An 1850 report published in *Lloyd's Weekly* on a proposed bill for centralized education claims that, “Such is the condition of society in our day, that the population are educated whether they will or no. If they are not educated for good, they are for evil—if they are not trained for a career of honest industry, they are for one of vice and crime” (“National Education”). Others, such as letter writer R.W., blame parents and other home influences for the presence of educated persons in the criminal class, and many reformers, such as Assistant Poor Law Commissioner James Phillips Kay, sing the praises of schools because by attending school

“the child is separated from the contaminating influence of the street or lane in which his parents reside. He no longer wanders about to contract filth and vice; his passions, under no wholesome restraint or guidance, daily growing in strength and distortion” (26). An 1857 editorial in *The Era* laments, “while dirty homes, intemperance, wife beating, and the gin palace are the constant associates of the child's existence what hope is there of permanently improving the mental soil of children so parantaged?” (“National Education”). Many reformers, particularly during the beginning of the era, argued in favor of state-supported education so that children would learn the “right” values rather than the immoral or antisocial ones they might acquire if left to their own devices. Educator John Dufton, for example, believed that “The chief difficulty in teaching the ignorant does not arise from their incapacity to receive instruction, but from that capacity being already overloaded with previous and depraved instruction” (5).

These three discourses—disease, crime, and education— intersected to form an underlying social theory that the poor were unhygienic and criminal out of moral ignorance or infirmity rather than social circumstances. Under that reasoning, education would in fact seem the solution to all these troubles. Chadwick himself advocated this point of view, stating, “If these great means of prevention, educational, and sanitary be duly prosecuted, pauperism must eventually be of comparatively unfrequent occurrence, and a charge of little public account” (504). This attention to depravity explains why *morality* was the word most associated with *education* between 1830 and 1850. The link between *morality* and *education* also unveils the unstated assumption that centralized education would target lower-class children because of the social belief that middle- and upper-class children were being raised in clean and religious homes and thus not in need of government-sponsored rescue.

Although <ignorance is a disease> alludes to systemic forces in the guise of the public health laws, it focuses attention on individual choice. The system may help improve conditions, but it cannot do so without the cooperation of the subject to take advantage of systemic changes, however meager. Comparing ignorance to disease addresses both the *how* and *what* of education. First, it names the public health and crime rates as issues of ignorance that education can solve. It thereby frames education as a matter of public health and thus justifies government intervention for the safety of society as a whole. <Ignorance is a disease> radically extends the reform argument by suggesting the government should not only fund schools, but also compel attendance. As those who deploy <ignorance is a disease> point out, public health efforts only succeed if everyone complies. In equating the importance of education with the importance of disease prevention, social and physical, reformers imply that as long as education remains optional, ignorance will remain a scourge of society. It also places clear expectations on schools. If education is a disease that breeds crime, then an increasingly educated populace should have a decreasing crime rate. In fact, an 1847 *Daily News* article explicitly states, “education and freedom from crime must bear the relation to each other of cause and effect; and, therefore, when education is at a maximum, crime must of necessity be at a minimum” (“Education and Crime”). The article does go on to question whether such education is possible, or if schools can only provide “instruction,” but this evidence conveys the stakes placed on a public school system. Under this metaphor, schools are successful only if they eliminate, or at least diminish, crime rates.

While these are powerful rhetorical moves, ignorance does not map onto disease without some gaps in the comparison. It assumes that education is able to be administered with the same efficiency as pharmaceuticals and retains the same efficacy. Whatever warrants exist for placing

faith in education as a moral inoculation against selfishness and discontent, it is unrealistic to expect every student to respond to the 'medicine' in the same socially-desired way; even medicine for the body is subject to vagaries of individual chemistry. Reformers largely ignored the possibility that education, in and of itself, might not be a one-stop solution to the nation's problems. Opponents of state-sponsored education exploited this weakness in the metaphor. Reverend Conder mocked, "the cure-all of this age seemed to be popular education" ("Conference of the Friends"). A few years later, an editorial in the Nottinghamshire Guardian extended the metaphor of disease to attack a politician's misguidedness, declaring, "A thousand men may be cognizant of a disease for one that can devise or even apply proper remedy; and Lord John Russell was accordingly in a very different position when as a grievance-monger he came forward to expose the appalling wants of the country in regard to Education; from that in which he found himself when, as a great political doctor, he stood up and professed the cure of these evils" ("Education in England"). Professor Huxley, the principal of the South London Working Men's College, provided the most blunt example in contending, "there is a chorus of voices almost distressing in its harmony raised in favour of the doctrine that education is the great panacea for modern troubles, and that if the country is not shortly to go to the dogs, everybody must be educated" ("Professor Huxley"). In so doing, these stakeholders flipped the script. Rather than rebutting the reformer's claim, they used the same metaphor to point out its unrealistic idealism.

### **Education Is Bread**

Until the mid-1850s, newspaper headlines about education reform tended toward the generic "Education" or "National Education," and contained phrases such as "education of the

people” or “mass education.” This broad wording betrays the content of the articles, which concern only education proposals for the lower class. The “Education Question” was thus not an inclusive one, as it entirely excluded the upper and middle classes. The middle class felt squeezed out of the opportunities an elementary education afforded. Some middle-class parents were unable to afford the school fees levied, as their children were ineligible to attend most charity schools even if they could not pay fees at other schools. Those who were able complained of inadequate instruction. For example, a letter to the *Daily News* in 1857 claims, “annually multitudes of young gentlemen of highly respectable and sometimes even wealthy families, are, upon examination, rejected as unfit to be appointed to government situations requiring but a very moderate amount of general information” (C.). The focus on improving lower-class education threatened the carefully preserved class demarcations through the fear that lower-class children were receiving superior educations to those of the middle class. The Duke of Newcastle explained in 1863 that “the result of this of course has been that the character of education of the lower classes has been greatly raised, and it was fast becoming clear...that unless the middle classes made a great push, the lower classes must inevitably not only catch them up, but in a very short time supplant them, so far as education and the beneficial results and advantages of education were concerned” (“The Duke of Newcastle”).

Because of this increased concern about the lower class benefitting disproportionately from the existing non-system of schooling, a shift occurred in the 1850s and 1860s in the wording of headlines. “Middle-Class Education” began appearing, as did the new term “popular education.” The phrases “education of the people” and “mass education” continued to indicate attention to only the lower class, while “popular education” signaled attention to both classes. An 1862 article in *The Morning Post* illustrated the distinction between these labels. It traced the



history of English education, beginning with upper- and middle-class education that gave way to a desire to educate “the masses” at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to the article, 1839 was a watershed year in which “Popular education became henceforth an object of considerable public interest” (“New Minute”). As the ensuing accomplishments of education expansion were enumerated, no distinctions were made among the classes.

Collapsing middle and lower-class education under the umbrella term “popular education” exacerbates the invisibility of the middle class in educational matters. Indeed, it is odd to think of the middle class as “invisible,” since it has come to be viewed as the driving force of the Victorian era. The metaphor <education is bread>, which arose during the same period as the language of middle-class/popular education, aids in understanding the relationship between the middle class and education policy. The first of more than a dozen instances I found of <education is bread> dates to 1853, when a *Lloyd’s Weekly* editorial supports a proposed education bill even though “it is far too limited” on the grounds that “If the half-loaf be better than no bread—a half-measure of education... is not to be rejected” (“Half-Measure on Education”). An 1855 article in *The Morning Post*, though commending growing interest in education, cautions, “The Education Question, like the question of cheap bread, or slave-grown sugar, is a question of figures as well as of feeling” (“Untitled”). Through the years, education increasingly became associated with the necessity of government intervention, as when an 1866 editorial in the *Pall Mall Gazette* argued that educating their children was a moral duty of parents “just as it is their moral duty to provide them with food and clothing,” but if the parents will not or cannot, “To restrain a parent from starving his child is as great a violation of freedom as to restrain him from letting it run wild about the streets” (“Public Education”). During an 1868 speech, M.P. Forster also equated bread with education, claiming, “We must set to work to make

laws to prevent ignorance, as the poor-laws were passed to prevent bodily starvation” (“National Education”).

Though comparing education to bread initially brings to mind notions of nourishment and compassion, this metaphor, through its connection to the New Poor Laws, pushes an agenda of self-reliance, advocating an industry-based ideology. These examples reference the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which revised the Poor Law of 1601. Under the Elizabethan poor laws, the parish subsidized wages that fell below the living wage out of the local rates (Adamson 13-14). By the early 19th century, this system had become unsustainable; nationally, one out of every seven people received “outdoor relief,” and by the 1830s, the majority of the population in some parishes qualified (Adamson 14). Due to economic changes caused by the Industrial Revolution, poverty was no longer viewed as a series of isolated cases affecting individuals but rather a systemic problem (Pool 244). In addition to the fiscal unviability of unreformed outdoor relief, a combination of cultural factors prompted new Poor Law legislation. In 1798, the Reverend Thomas Malthus published *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, in which he argued that unless population growth abated, particularly among the poor, England would not have the resources to meet demand, causing famine and starvation (Steinbach 41). Additionally, the prejudice against the poor stemming from utilitarian/evangelical attitudes—marked by the belief that the poor were inherently lazy and needed strong incentives to seek employment—was rising (Steinbach 41). Those not on relief complained it dis-incentivized work and was unfair to those who had secured employment (Pool 244).

These forces influenced the New Poor Laws, under which outdoor relief was banned. Anyone in need of financial assistance was forced to apply to a workhouse. Workhouses were designed to be as unappealing and degrading as possible to discourage their use. Upon entering,

families were separated, with men, women, and children each going to separate wings (Wilson 29). Personal possessions had to be abandoned; this included clothing, which was exchanged for a uniform. Food was bad even by prison standards, yet workhouse inmates were forced to perform the same backbreaking manual labor as prisoners (Pool 245). Although conditions were intentionally sparse, workhouse supervisors sometimes took deprivation of the inmates to extremes. In the notorious case of the Andover Workhouse, rations were so limited inmates chewed on candles or fought barnyard animals for scraps in order to survive (Wilson 32). In a report on juvenile crime, Samuel Phillips Day states many pauper children prefer prison to the workhouse, because “There, at least, they would be taken proper care of; if ill, their maladies would meet with prompt attention; and if they needs must work hard, why they would be fed well” (21).

The workhouse, much like the debtor's prison, created a paradox. How can one escape from poverty if one is kept away from the means to escape from poverty? Yet the workhouse was never intended to raise people out of poverty according to Edwin Chadwick, one of the original Poor Law Commissioners. In an 1864 report evaluating the efficacy of the New Poor Laws he explicitly stated, “We did not propose to extend the provision to the relief of *poverty*,” which he defined as “the state of one who, in order to obtain a mere subsistence, is forced to have some recourse to labour,” and that furthermore, “we thought it would be extremely mischievous if we did” (403). The ideology of the poorhouse—that the state must force citizens into the private labor market to prove their value to the capitalistic society—also appeared in conversations about the value of education. At the groundbreaking of a new school in 1855, the Dean of Hereford promoted education because “Education taught a man the necessity of labour” (“Dean of Hereford”). In 1867, M.P. Bazley similarly argued for the importance of universal education

because “the children of the poor should be placed beyond the probability of finding an asylum in a prison or a poorhouse” (“Mr. Bazley, M.P.”).

Writers of the New Poor Law sought to encourage participation in the labor market by making poor relief physically and psychologically unendurable. Though <education is bread> lacks the punitive element contained in the New Poor Law, it creates the expectation that a school system should decrease individual need of government assistance. It also privileges individual over systemic actions by implying that the 'unsuccessful' simply do not hold the correct values. This metaphor, therefore, maintains a social world in which poverty is caused by individual choices or immorality, rather than by outside forces such as low wages.

The ideology grounding the New Poor Law accounts for the absence of middle-class needs in discourses about education policy. Raymond Williams posits that the middle class defined the dominant social character of the Victorian era. That is, the attitudes of the middle class—those of hard work and individual effort (Williams 60) championed in the New Poor Law—were the ones other classes, particularly the lower class, were supposed to emulate. Because schools replicate the dominant social character (Williams 125), it is not the middle class who needs ‘indoctrination’ into cultural values, but the lower class. The problem, of course, is that to elevate the lower class without providing for the middle class potentially creates conditions that allow the lower class to usurp the positioning of the middle class. Brantlinger interprets Victorian industrial novels as advocating a contradictory moral: “first, through honesty and perseverance, the free individual can move mountains; and second, the middle class has a monopoly on honesty and perseverance. . . . The monopoly on virtue exists because, with luck, anybody who exercises honesty and perseverance will automatically ascend into the middle class” (*Reading* 120). From the political perspective, priority should be given to those who reside

outside the boundaries of social acceptability and not those who define it. Yet doing so risks degrading the middle class's cultural and economic influence.

The relationship between education and the economy creates a tension. On the one hand, education would improve economic productivity. An 1853 letter to the editor of the *Daily News* specifically says, "increased education increases the production of wealth, and when any one article is cheapened, all consumers partake of the advantages, and men gain from the general prosperity in the measure of their previous possessions" (Watts). A few years later, one W.L. Clay wrote to the *Daily News*, "The increase of education has undoubtedly raised the average rate of wages in England. In fact education forms one of the chief checks on the tendency of competition to beat down wages in this crowded country...any agency, such as education, which develops the self-respect of the labouring classes will raise, as in England it has raised, their standard of requirements, and thus necessitate an increase of wages." At an 1858 meeting of the Pontefract Mechanics' Institution, M.P. Milnes "believed the result of increased education would be an improvement in household and mechanical labour of every kind, that time would be saved, and the general advantage of the employer and employed would be advanced proportionably to the intelligence and education of the workmen" ("Mr. Milnes). At the groundbreaking of a new school in 1855, the Dean of Hereford remarked in a speech that though many people thought allowing the lower class to learn more than reading and writing "his own experience went to show, that the more the lower classes were educated, the better they were fitted to fulfil the offices of life. Some said, 'What was the use of so much education?'; He would ask, what was the use of so much ignorance? If education was no safeguard to society ignorance was less so. Education taught a man the necessity of labour" ("Dean of Hereford"). These statements reveal

a belief that education improved England by raising the intelligence, and in turn productivity, of the English worker.

On the other hand, education also had the potential to eliminate a lower class willing to perform manual labor. The notion that education was meant to reinforce class status was an old one. As far back as 1839, Poor Law Commissioner James Kay had declared that education should prepare pauper children “to earn their livelihood by skilful labour, and to fit them to discharge their social duties by training them in correct moral habits, and giving them knowledge suited to their station in life”—specifically for agriculture as well a military and domestic service (Kay 8). At mid-century, however, politicians and educationists began focusing on schools as sites of job training rather than education broadly construed in order to assuage middle-class resistance to expanding education based on fears that the lower class would supplant the middle class. At the ground-breaking of a National school in 1855, the Dean of Hereford reassured the spectators, “Among these duties was that of giving to the lower classes of society the means, in education, of improving their mental state; not, indeed, so much to raise them in the artificial scale of life, as in that far nobler scale of morality which would lead to everlasting happiness” (“The Dean of Hereford”). At an 1866 town hall meeting, the Earl de Grey exhorted, “Give them that knowledge which will not puff them up, which will not make them conceited of the little they know, but modest when they think of all they know not” (“Earl de Grey”). The future Prime Minister Robert Cecil similarly complained at an education conference in 1857 that “we are, I fear, too apt to use an unreal and lofty language in talking to the poor about the blessings of education. Beyond all doubt we cannot insist too strongly upon education exerting a lofty influence...But the working man requires more than that. He requires that the instruction given to his child should be that which would bear on his future calling—that it should, in fact, be

productive of solid and tangible advantage” (“Labour Education”). Indeed, mid-century discussion of education for both classes emphasized “solid and tangible advantage.” At the 1866 opening of a middle-class school, the mayor of London outlined its vision, noting the students “should receive a sound commercial education, such as would fit them for tradesmen, warehousemen, and clerks” (“Middle-Class Education”).

Because the New Poor Laws created a centralized system (though locally executed), <education is bread> implicitly argues in favor of a state-sponsored, albeit non-compulsory, school system. Seeking relief under the New Poor Laws was voluntary, so the direct comparison implies that school attendance should also be optional. Indeed, many stakeholders who argued in favor of a public school system but against compulsion used <education is bread> in their arguments. For example, at the inauguration of the 1867 winter session of the Literary Institute, M.P. Clay asserted, “if it is the duty of the country to prevent the body from dying of starvation, it is almost equally the duty of the country to see that the minds of the people do not remain for ever in a state of semi-existence, hardly ever having any real life but as it were vegetating, remaining in a state of utter and hopeless ignorance, as destructive to physical life as it is dangerous to the soul” (“M.P. on the Education Question”). He then uses <ignorance is a disease> to argue against compulsion, noting, “we know that people do not like to be obliged even to avoid the small-pox...and the probability is that if you could introduce nectar, water that liquor of the gods may have been—if you could introduce it I say among the people, and force them by act of parliament to drink it, they would drink it very much as if it were so much physic” (“M.P. on the Education Question”). Yet this metaphor was also used to argue in favor of compulsion, as did the Reverend John Oakley. Oakley, serving as secretary of the London Diocesan Board of Education, countered complaints that compulsory attendance would be “un-

English” by asking if “you allow the selfish parent liberty to starve his child, to desert his child, to maim and torture his child? No. Then why should you give him liberty to let his child grow up a helpless, useless, costly, mischievous, because uninintelligent member of society?” (“Compulsory Education” *Daily News*).

### **Students Are Fields**

<Students are fields> did not begin appearing until the 1850s, but what it lacked in longevity it made up for in intensity. Sometimes, the conditions of schooling are compared to unhealthy fields, such as penned by John Watts to the *Daily News* alleging that “Educational voluntaryism does its work in patches, leaving shreds in some places, and broad fields in others, uncultivated, and its votaries very frequently stumble over each other, and thus waste effort” (Watts). A letter to the *Morning Post* similarly charged that “Education has been a name and not a reality, if it has achieved anything, it has done evil instead of good; briars have been planted and watered instead of fruit-trees; weeds instead of flowers have grown up apace” (“Education of the Higher Classes”). The more positive deployment of the metaphor focuses on schools “bearing fruit,” meaning moral and economic productivity. For example, an editorial in an 1862 edition of the *Morning Post* proclaimed, “Popular education is the noblest work on which we can employ the leisure of peace and the wealth of prosperity. The energies which have earned the blessings are justly entitled to share the fruits. These fruits are knowledge, virtue, and happiness, with the requisite training in the arts by which they are matured” (“The New Minute”). One W.C. Lake shared similar optimism in a letter to the *Daily News*, pronouncing that “endowments of English education have borne good fruit, and are capable of bearing better.”



These metaphors about investment and growth map onto discourses about the mid-century's rapidly expanding economy. Despite booms and slumps, the economy expanded by an average of 3% every year, cementing England as the richest nation in the world (Steinbach 88). Also, transportation by land and sea improved (Steinbach 82). As the economy became more specialized, demand for services—not just domestic servants but also clergy, doctors, funeral directors, and retailers—increased (Steinbach 84).

In addition to economic prosperity, education was also viewed as a means of securing political stability, particularly in the years immediately preceding the Reform Act of 1832. This act allowed the “respectable working man” to vote, even if he did not own property. All male heads of household were allowed to vote, as were male lodgers who spent at least £10 a year on rent (Steinbach 47). In light of this, opponents to education reform begin to soften their stance that government intervention was an affront to liberty. In fact, education became the *preserver* of English liberty. First, there was feeling that the character of the masses must be raised in order for them to vote responsibly. This was hardly a new notion. As far back as 1839 *The Operative* had published an editorial claiming

the broad and general ground on which that opposition is based, is that it is a measure calculated in some degree to raise the character of the industrious and labouring classes by the extension of the means of intelligence amongst them; and the successful existence of a Tory party can only be sustained in a country where the people are to a certain degree unawakened to a sense of their own rights as men, and are not sufficiently enlightened to assert their lawful claims to universal education and equal representation. (“National Education”)

In 1843, Gladstone gave a speech asserting that “the constitution of this country calls upon the people for their free and their intelligent support; it is also true that extensive franchises are committed to numerous classes of the population; it is also true that without the intelligent assent and attachment of those numerous classes to whom I advert, the institutions of the country could

not be supported” (“Mr. Gladstone's Speech”). An 1853 *Daily News* editorial claimed, “As wise, good, and useful citizens are essential to the prosperity, order, and happiness of society, and as no individual grows up possessed of those qualities without some kind of instruction, it becomes the duty of every person to promote, by every means in his power, the extension of such a system of education as shall give every individual in the community a chance, if not the certainty, of growing up to be wise, good, and useful” (“Duties of the People”). In 1859, Sir J. Coleridge voiced the belief that “If the 'lower orders' are to be raised to political power then it is certain you must cultivate those orders to discharge the duties which will devolve upon them” (“Sir J. Coleridge”). The more imminent the passing of the second Great Reform became, however, the more intensely this rhetoric was used. An 1866 *Pall Mall Gazette* editorial states, “The advancement of the democratic element in the government of this country is inevitable; it may prove either a curse or a blessing, and there is only one way of ensuring its turning out a blessing—namely, the real and thorough education of the middle class, including, we presume, the education of the whole body of the enfranchised portion of the artisan world” (“Political Education”). Lord Taunton, head of the 1865 Schools Inquiry Commission, claimed, “it was of the utmost consequence that all classes of the community, and especially those classes about to be called upon to take an immense part in the government of the country, should receive a training and education to make them fit and capable for the discharge of the duties imposed on them” (“Lord Taunton”).

An economy rapidly changed by technology and globalization demanded thoughtfully adept workers in the same way an increasingly democratic nation required reasonably rational voters. A public school system, then, is an investment that must pay off through economic prosperity and political stability. While <students are fields> may be the most compelling

metaphor—indeed, the one that ultimately convinced Parliament to write the first education legislation—in many ways it is also the weakest. On a purely rhetorical level, it lacks the built-in solutions of the previous metaphors; though it does construe education as important, <students are fields> does not take a position on subsidies, compulsion, or other means of provision. Partially due to the absence of a clear solution, and in part because <students are fields> touches on even more facets of society than <ignorance is a disease> and <education is bread>, disentangling cause and effect in this metaphor is impossible. An economy may falter for any number of reasons that have nothing to do with the education level or intelligence of the population, but if <students are fields>, the school system has failed. It is easy to fall onto platitudes such as, 'The people are not supporting my candidate, and the only possible reason is their lack of intelligence.' In fact, in an 1846 letter to the *Morning Post*, Richard Oastler argued that if the voters were to be properly educated, “Then we shall never again witness the disgraceful sight of cheering in the House of Commons while a prime Minister declares his ignorance of any Constitution save that of 1688! Then we shall no more be disgusted by seeing a Lord Chancellor propose such a measure as the new Poor Law!” In this way, personal choices become indictments of an institution because of the expectation that institutions prompt its participants to think and act “correctly.”

### **Conclusion**

Significantly, these metaphors largely obscure middle-class desires for education. The vices education could allegedly eradicate were associated with the lower class. Using <ignorance is a disease>, <education is bread>, and <students are fields> as the primary metaphors in the reform debate frames education reform as a lower-class need with only occasional references to

the ways in which middle-class families struggled to provide for their children. The decision to create policies focusing solely on the lower class would have curricular and administrative consequences, that are the subject of the following chapters.

<Ignorance is a disease> and <education is bread> were used to make powerful arguments because of their association with other pressing public sphere problems in the era. Both suggest that education will ameliorate undesirable social conditions, including crime, disease, and sloth. These two metaphors also perpetuate a social faith in hard work that was necessary to the Victorian economic structure. Yet this creates a contradiction. Improving the state of society improves the lot of the individual, which could destabilize the carefully constructed social hierarchy credited with preserving England during an era of global unrest. The challenge, then, was to educate the lower class enough to improve society in general without advancing its members beyond their station, as that would threaten an arguably undereducated middle class.

## CHAPTER 4. CONSIDERING CURRICULUM

In the first chapter of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy contrasts the eponymous character with her mother by noting that “Between the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed.” Though the novel is set in the 1870s—a decade that felt the first effects of education reform—*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was serialized in 1891, almost thirty years after the first Revised Code, twenty years after the first Elementary Education Act, and the same year school fees were abolished. The narrator’s passing comment communicates the many changes English education had undergone in the previous decades, shifting from the patchwork of localized and domestic forms of schooling to a centralized system with a formalized curriculum and standardized exams, both of which had been modified more than a dozen times between 1862 and 1889. Yet despite the narrative of progress in this passage, a tone of bitterness seeps through, suggesting this progress had been barely more than cosmetic. Despite legislative efforts to improve the state of English education in the second half of the nineteenth century, disappointments continued to plague the fledgling system.

The 1850s saw a boom in political interest regarding education. This is the decade that saw the rise in popularity of the metaphor <education is bread> as seen in Chapter 3 as well as two new terministic screens <sound and cheap> and <efficient>. Concern about the quality of education prompted the forming of three commissions: the Newcastle Commission of 1861

studied schools of the lower class, the Clarendon Commission<sup>10</sup> of 1864 focused on the schools of the upper class, and the Taunton Commission of 1867 attended to “[a]ll that lies between these limits” (Schools Inquiry Commission). Though <sound and cheap> framed these particular charges, <efficient> was a more widely used and influential terministic screen, appearing in nearly every official education policy. Making <efficient> schools the primary goal shaped policies that narrowed the curriculum to easily measured subjects with little attention to other areas of study that hewed more closely to the public’s desired outcomes. In order to explore the formal and hidden curriculums of London board schools, then, I will use the Newcastle and Taunton reports, the Revised Codes, and teacher training manuals<sup>11</sup>. *Introductory Text-Book to School Education, Method, and School Management* by John Gill is addressed to “that large and increasing body, who are being prepared for the onerous duties and great responsibilities of the teacher's office” (iii). A.B.R Park's *A Manual of Method for Pupil-teachers and Assistant Master* is “intended for the government inspected schools of Great Britain and Ireland, and for the use of students in training colleges,” according to its subtitle. These are both traditional textbooks appropriate for use in the normal schools to train teachers. John J. Prince's *School Management and Method in Theory and Practice*, however, belongs to a different genre, as its subtitle indicates: “a manual for teachers, students, pupil teachers, and others intending to sit for government certificates, or at the scholarship examinations.” *School Management and Method*, then, is a study guide, akin to the current Kaplan guides for tests like the ACT and GRE. The first few chapters of each book cover principles of school discipline. The next section lays out

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<sup>10</sup> I have omitted the Clarendon Commission because its focus on solely upper-class schools falls outside the scope of my project.

<sup>11</sup> Board schools, provided for in the Education Act of 1870, were built in localities underserved by private schools.

methods for teaching subjects. Each book covers reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, geography, grammar, and history, in that order. *A Manual of Method* also includes dictation, composition, specific subjects, and physical education. *Introductory Textbook* includes scriptural instruction.

This chapter suggests that the terministic screens used in the political discourse about education reform create some divergences from the purposes of schooling set forth in the public discourse. While the public discourse focused on the ways in which a central education system would improve society, politicians crafted policies to ensure education was somewhat akin to the modern fast food hamburger: sufficient in purpose while being quick and cheap. The more formal the policies that were crafted, the more emphasis tended to be placed on quick and cheap delivery. Rather than being guided by metaphors such as <ignorance is a disease> or <education is bread> as the general public and politicians were, policymakers thought about education in terms of <efficiency>. In addition, Parliament's focus on "fixing" lower-class education while not providing for middle-class education caused a curricular crisis that required complicated policy revisions. These two circumstances shed light on ways in which education reform efforts can simultaneously fail and succeed.

### **Commissions and Terministic Screens**

While the concerns of the early Victorian era focused on explicitly systemic issues such as access to schooling and compulsory attendance, by the mid-point of the century attention, at least in Parliament, shifted from quantity to quality. Sir John Pakington's 1855 speech to the House of Commons advocating for a Department of Education serves as a compact model of these concerns regarding the quality of English education. He asserted that the education

question was even more important than the then-raging Crimean War. The war, he believed, would end in a matter of months, but without attending to education, “we shall still find ourselves surrounded by that mass of ignorance and of crime which is now tarnishing our national character, and, I believe, sapping and undermining our national prosperity” (Pakington). To bolster this claim, he asserted that according to recent surveys “about 1-18 part of the whole, the masters or mistresses—the persons upon whom the efficiency of the school mainly depended—were unable to write their own names” and that 98% of schools included reading in the curriculum, but only 68% writing, 61% arithmetic, 44% grammar, 39% geography, 10% music, and 2% industrial arts or mechanics—the subject Pakington deemed most important. He thus proposed the implementation of a Department of Education, which he consciously modeled after the Poor Law Boards. Just as Parliament funded locally controlled Poor Law Boards to distribute relief, he envisioned a centralized Department of Education that would allocate funds to locally controlled school boards, which would, in turn, build and manage schools run by the majority religion in the area. Pakington’s speech clearly aligns with most of the social anxieties charted in Chapter 3: rampant crime, blighted national prestige, and a sub-operational economy. Furthermore, he transforms <education is bread> from a metaphor into a policy by replicating the structure of the New Poor Laws in his own plan for education. Yet at the same time that Members of Parliament were drafting various plans for improving education, Chancellor of the Exchequer William Gladstone, who had never given much support to financing education, was putting pressure on the Cabinet to further reduce expenditures in order to offset costs associated with the Crimean War (Sylvester 44).

Given the dual needs for clarity concerning the actual conditions of schooling in England and a reduction in funding to those schools, the Newcastle and Taunton Commissions were



charged “To Inquire into the Present State of Popular Education in England, and to Consider and Report what Measures, if any, are required for the Extension of Sound and Cheap Elementary Instruction to all Classes of the People” (Education Commission 1, Schools Inquiry Commission iii-iv). I call attention to the words “sound and cheap” as descriptions of elementary education because of their deployment as terministic screens. Terministic screens, according to Kenneth Burke, are words or phrases that direct the attention (Burke 49). That is, we may strive to use terms that accurately describe a phenomenon, but those words can only represent one aspect of that phenomenon at a time. In choosing one term, we reject every other, and that choice emphasizes and elides aspects of the concept. <Sound and cheap> reflects the two primary concerns of the 1850s: English education is ineffective, and also too expensive. This terministic screen, then, channels attention toward the pedagogical and pecuniary. In narrowing the focus to <sound and cheap>, some of the public expectations for schools become muted in conversations about education policy. The underlying goal was to make education <efficient,> the predominant terministic screen in crafting education policy.

A <sound> education assumed students would assimilate into the working world with little or no further training. An 1857 article from *The Era* most succinctly encapsulates the definition of <sound> as “one that will make him useful in his sphere” (“National Education”). Indeed, by the 1860s, the concern shifted from students not receiving enough education to students receiving *too much* education. At the 1863 distribution of prizes at Collegiate Institution at Liverpool, Lord Derby warned, “there is some risk, with regard to the lower classes, that our education should be too ambitious, and that in striving to crowd a vast amount of instruction into the very limited space of time which alone can be afforded, we run the risk of getting, not a sound, wholesome, elementary education, but a superficial smattering of a great deal, without a

solid knowledge of that which is most useful” (“Lord Derby”). Thus, for schools to be <sound and cheap> was insufficient. Because sustained attendance remained a problem, particularly for the lower class, <efficiency>, which connotes not only <sound and cheap> but also celerity, became the driving force of education reform. The Newcastle commissioners lament that of the schools they investigated, “scarcely one in 12, are in that state of efficiency which shall send forth a child at 10 years of age into the world, for the work of life, with that amount of scholarship which I attempted to describe” (Education Commission 247). The Taunton Commission also found that many middle-class children “have no suitable schools within their reach where they can be sure of efficient teaching, and that consequently great numbers of the youth of the middle class, and especially of its lower divisions, are insufficiently prepared for the duties of life, or for the ready and intelligent acquisition of that technical instruction, the want of which is alleged to threaten such injurious consequences to some of our great industrial interests” (Schools Inquiry Commission 661).

The Report of the Newcastle Commission concludes that in regard to the “independent poor,” i.e., not paupers or vagrants, an increasing number of children were exposed to the elements of an elementary education. Yet rural and small schools were not receiving enough aid, and thus the current system was “not adapted to effect, a general diffusion of sound elementary education amongst all the classes of the poor” (Education Commission 295). The commissioners claim that

the instruction given is commonly both too ambitious and too superficial in its character, that (except in the very best of schools) it has been too exclusively adapted to the elder scholars to the neglect of the younger ones, and that it often omits to secure a thorough *grounding* in the simplest but most essential parts of instruction...a main object of the schools is defeated in respect of every child who, having attended for a considerable time, leaves without the power of reading, writing, and cyphering in an intelligent manner. (Education Commission 296)

The recommendations are intended to ensure “that all the children who attend the elementary day schools of the country should be induced to attend with sufficient regularity to enable them, within a reasonable period, to obtain a mastery over the indispensable elements of knowledge, reading, writing, and the primary rules of arithmetic” (Schools Inquiry Commission 296). Thus the commissioners begin to translate the concept of a <sound> education into curriculum.

The Taunton Commission, because of its focus on the middle class, had a much broader view of what constituted a <sound> education. They envisioned three “grades” of schools: third grade would cater to students who would attend through age fourteen, second grade for up to age sixteen, and first grade for up to age eighteen. These schools would be discrete rather than continuous; that is, a child would not attend a third grade school until age fourteen and then matriculate to a second grade school (Schools Inquiry Commission 578). Rather, a student of a third grade school would enter the workforce at fourteen, of a second grade school at sixteen, and a first grade school at eighteen (or more likely for the first grade student, attend university). According to the commissioners, the first and second grade “seem to meet the demands of all the wealthier part of the community, including not only gentry and professional men, but all the larger shopkeepers, rising men of business, and the larger tenant farmers,” while the third grade is appropriate for “the smaller tenant farmers, the small tradesmen, the superior artisans” (Schools Inquiry Commission 20). They concede “these distinctions correspond roughly, but by no means exactly, to the gradations of society” (Schools Inquiry Commission 16). Indeed, they report disdain for private schools in part because the “inferior” ones “owe their very existence to the unwillingness of many of the tradesmen and others just above the manual labourers to send their sons to the National or the British School” (Schools Inquiry Commission 297). They lament the fact that private schools “owe their origin to the operation of the ordinary commercial

principle of supply and demand” (Schools Inquiry Commission 284) and thus compromise academic and disciplinary integrity to satisfy the whims of parents (Schools Inquiry Commission 291). They praise proprietary schools highly on academic grounds, but nevertheless deem them unacceptable because they are as exclusionary as private schools. Conversely, they consider endowed schools academically unfit but admire their willingness to admit any intellectually and financially capable student. Even if this tended to be more a philosophical stance than actual exercise in comingling the classes, the commissioners clearly valued the gesture toward egalitarianism (Schools Inquiry Commission 144-146).

Having defined the problem, the commissioners explore a variety of solutions, beginning their report with the wishes of English parents. Though different grades desired different ends, there was general agreement on one point: schools should not prepare students for specific careers. Parents thought “general education” more useful because “the boy whose powers of mind had been carefully trained speedily made up for special deficiencies” (Schools Inquiry Commission 21). Indeed, the commissioners point out, specialized training in many cases might be a waste of time. Using bookkeeping as an example, the commissioners write, “It was said that a boy who had learnt it often found the particular system which he had learnt was not that which he afterwards had to practice; while, on the other hand, a boy who had a thorough mastery of arithmetic could learn any system of book-keeping in a very short time” (Schools Inquiry Commission 21). Based on their interviews with parents and the overall agreement on the primacy of a general education, the commissioners categorized subjects into three main branches that parents deemed most useful for their children—language (including English and English literature), mathematics, and natural science (Schools Inquiry Commission 22). Their view of a sound education included English literature, some form of foreign language, mathematics,

natural science, and political economy for all socioeconomic classes. To that, third grade schools were to add poetry recitation, geography, and history, while second grade schools added only mechanics.

### **The Infinitely Revised Code**

Policymakers, then, sought to make education useful, frugal, and expeditious. The paradigm of this approach is Robert Lowe's Revised Code of 1862, which changed funding from block grants allocated primarily based on attendance to payments based on individual students' results on annual examinations in Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic<sup>12</sup>. Notably, the fourth provision of the Code states, "The object of the grant is to promote the education of children belonging to the classes who support themselves by manual labour" (*Report 1862* xvi), a statement enacted through the subjects chosen for examination. Once again, the needs of the middle class were being treated as less important than those of the lower. One might charitably point out that the Revised Code was implemented between the release of the Newcastle Commission Report and Taunton Commission Report, but it could also be argued that it was no accident the Newcastle Commission was formed first in 1858, followed by the Clarendon in 1861, and finally the Taunton in 1864, since the lower class tended to be the focus of education reform.

The neglect of provisions for the middle class had serious, and somewhat confusing, consequences for the curriculum as prescribed in the Revised Code. Although the emphasis had been the disciplining of lower-class children, it is not at all clear that this targeted demographic

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<sup>12</sup> The specific academic requirements for earning grants under the Revised Code are detailed in Chapter 5.

benefitted from education reform efforts. As early as 1853, HMI Matthew Arnold explained that “in the schools which I visit, and above all in the Wesleyan schools which I visit, the children of the actually lowest, poorest classes in this country, of what are called the masses, are not, to speak generally, educated; that the children who are educated in them belong to a different class from these; and that, consequently, of the education of the masses, I, in the course of my official duty, see, strictly speaking, little or nothing” (*Report 1854* 1046). Two years later Arnold reports, “I hear many complaints that too high a standard of attainment is now required in elementary schools; that the exact point up to which it is desirable to instruct the children attending them has been considerably outpassed; that the children are more and more instructed in subjects injudiciously chosen, and in a manner to unfit them for their future station and business in life” (*Report 1855* 53). He rejects the validity of these complaints because these schools

are not attended, as I have repeatedly said, by the lowest and poorest class of children: they are attended often by children who might well lay claim to an instruction of a more comprehensive and advanced kind than that which they obtain in them: they are attended universally by children who may well lay claim, on the score of social position and future prospects in life to be instructed not only in reading, writing, and the elements of arithmetic, but also in the higher rules of arithmetic—in geography, in English grammar, and in English history. (*Report 1855* 53)

This situation remained largely unchanged throughout the century. Twenty years later, Arnold once again noted that only Catholic and ragged schools take the “really poor” (*Report 1872* 25). In 1875, HMI Stokes pointed out that most students attending board schools had previously been active participants in the voluntary system and, as such, “few are drawn for the first time under educational influences from the neglected wanderers in the streets” (*Report 1875* 404). That same year, HMI Morrell painted a more complicated picture in which some schools were “attended almost wholly by young thieves and street arabs, and others in which the majority of

the scholars belong quite to the upper portion of the working classes” (*Report 1875* 373), although generally speaking the board school “showed a much more decided tendency to assume a middle-class form” (*Report 1875* 369). Inspector Stokes also saw this disparity, noting, “It will be seen that the Rolls Road School children, who cannot be classed as 'poor' except in a small minority of cases, and who are receiving an extremely useful and efficient education, owe five-sixths of the cost of their schooling to public sources,” and yet other schools “are attended by children as poor and neglected as can anywhere be found” (*Report 1879* 404-405). It is also common, however, for inspectors to refer to the general student population attending board schools as “poor children” without calling further attention to their definition of “poor.” Whatever the specific demographics attending these individual schools, these reports indicate that there were a greater variety of socioeconomic classes taking advantage of board schools than anticipated. This mingling of social classes meant that the carefully envisioned division of education was impractical, and policymakers risked both over- and under- educating English students.

The Revised Code was designed to serve the lower class, explicitly through its stated purpose and implicitly through the narrow curriculum that would provide “just enough” education to make lower-class students respectable citizens without fomenting the potential of social mobility—and thus instability. The fact that middle-class children, however, were using the schools designed for the lower class caused a problem due to the widely held belief that each socioeconomic class required a tailored curriculum. Thus the Code became “infinitely revised” in response to complaints that the curriculum had become too narrow and mechanical. In 1864, HMI Campbell noted, “With regard to the subjects of instruction, I find that they are naturally more strictly confined to those three which are called the ‘money-making’ subjects” (*Report*

1864 73). This was a refrain most eloquently phrased by HMI Morrell in 1867, when he explained that “if a money payment is attached to the proficiency in certain specified branches, those branches, in the eyes of the teacher, will soon cast all the others into the shade” (*Report 1867* 261). In his 1868 report, HMI Arnold lamented that “the matters of language, geography, and history, by which, in general, instruction first gets hold of a child’s mind and becomes stimulating and interesting to him, have in the great majority of schools fallen into disuse and neglect” (*Report 1868* 297).

In response, members of the Committee Council on Education began tweaking the Code every few years to broaden the curriculum without over-educating students. In 1882, the Committee introduced five *class* subjects<sup>13</sup>: English, geography, elementary science, history, and, for girls, needlework. Up to two of these subjects could be taken by the entire school in addition to the *obligatory* (sometimes referred to as *elementary*) subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The next year, the Committee dictated that if class subjects were offered, one had to be English. Additionally, if girls took needlework as a second class subject, the boys also had to take a second class subject, which now also included the option of singing. *Specific* subjects—advanced branches of mathematics, science, and foreign languages—could be made available to individual students who had passed the fourth standard, depending upon the capability of the teacher and student. In 1885, students could take up to three class subjects, but the Code limited choice. If one or two class subjects were offered, one had to be English. If three were offered, one had to be English and one had to be the newly introduced subject of drawing, but students

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<sup>13</sup> Class subjects, so called because they were taught to an entire class of students, were designed to encourage the teaching of subjects beyond the 3Rs.



who had passed the Fourth Standard and were placed in the upper division could not take history. However, if drawing and needlework were offered, it had to be taken in both divisions.

Though this expansion begins to look more like the second grade curriculum advocated by the Taunton Commission, the writers of the Code make extremely clear that these schools were intended for the lower class. In fact, the Code nearly apologizes for the breadth of education now possible for the lower class by writing, “It is not the intention of my Lords to encourage a pretentious or unreal pursuit of higher studies, or to encroach in any way on the province of secondary education. The course suited to an elementary school is practically determined by the age limit of 14 years; and may properly include whatever subjects can be effectively taught within that limit” (*Report 1883* 156). While the expansion may have appeared to violate the ‘good enough’ principle that had undergirded resistance to education reform, in practice its effects were limited. Rather than schools choosing subjects that best served the need of their populations, they tended toward subjects that were easy or popular in order to increase their funding through both exams and school fees. Thus geography was exceedingly popular, and history rarely attempted, as geography was easier to teach for the examination. Additionally, the Parliamentary regulations severely restricted the breadth of subjects taken.

### **Curricular Convergences and Divergences**

Having described the existing educational policy of the mid-Victorian era, it is fitting to think about how these policies, particularly regarding the curriculum, align with the expectations previously placed on the school system. As noted in Chapter 3, the top concern had been decreasing the crime rate through instillation of morality. According to the Commissioners and educationists, English literature and history, as well as a foreign language,

were the best means of so doing. The Commissioners, who considered literature and history offshoots of their Language category, advocated for thorough instruction in both English and foreign languages because “Nothing appears to develop and discipline the whole man so much as the study which assists the learner to understand the thoughts, to enter into the feelings, to appreciate the moral judgments of others” (Schools Inquiry Commission 22). Here, the Commissioners use language that points to the foundation of Victorian morality—entering into the feelings of others, that right feeling may prompt right action. The educationists tend to deal with the more confined subjects of literature and history. Park particularly praises the work of Sir Walter Scott as a means of cultivating “a taste for what is true, beautiful, natural, and refined” (76), while poetry is useful because “a healthy moral tone breathes and predominates in every page” (77). Gill instructs future teachers that “Our aim in teaching history...should be to inculcate those moral lessons which it is the office of history—‘the philosophy’ which teaches by example’—to supply” (Gill 199). These thoughts echo sentiments from earlier in the century regarding fear of a literate populace. Unlike the evangelicals of the early Victorian era, however, the Commissioners and educationists express no qualms about the double-edgedness of literacy. For them, it is a necessary and efficient tool for crafting moral citizens.

Yet the inculcation of morality is the only expectation directly addressed in the formal curriculum. Despite the emphasis on public health inherent in <ignorance is a disease>, the Commissioners have little to say about subjects that would promote it. Similarly, the desire to create financially independent and economically productive adults underlying <education is bread> is not explicitly addressed. Indeed, only Park uses commercial rationales for any subjects in the curriculum. He explains that modern languages “are *living tongues*, spoken by nations with whom we sustain intimate commercial and political relations” (Park 81) and articulates the

necessity of arithmetic, seeing to “how large an extent arithmetic enters into the business of daily life, it is of the utmost importance that our young people when at school should be trained to *calculate* with rapidity, accuracy, and ease” (Park 31). Finally, he explains the utility of drawing because it enables “a knowledge and love of art amongst artisans and others of similar rank” that will motivate “our workmen in the various trades and professions ‘to compete with, and even excel,’ in their productions” (Park 84). Scant attention is paid to the forming of democratically minded citizens. In fact, only English History is viewed as having such power. Park explains, “Every man is a citizen, and one part of his work in life is to discharge well and truly the duties of a citizen. He cannot do this if he is altogether ignorant of history. A man who knows little or nothing of the struggles which have been made to form the constitutional life of his country, and to secure to him his political privileges, must be sadly wanting in the dignity and intelligence of citizenship” (Park 61). Prince articulates more specifically the value of teaching the lower classes about English political history, asking “What could better assist in the promoting contentment and thankfulness among the people than comparing the condition of the working classes at the present day with that of the forefathers, or even with that of our foreign neighbours? What can assist more in promoting habits of industry than *tracing the improvement in the condition of the people?*” (Prince 159).

Arguably, these subjects had implicit connections to public expectations. Commissioners and educationists alike expressed faith in subjects that taught reasoning, which included not only Arithmetic and English History, but also Political Economy and Geography. The Taunton Commission, in particular, advocated for the teaching of Political Economy because it “bears directly on the conduct of life” and “supplies excellent examples of reasoning” (Schools Inquiry Commission 29). Gill found similar virtues in arithmetic, explaining, “Its tendency is to give

clear symbols, thoughts, and facts. It accustoms the mind to habits of investigation, and weakens the tendency to take things on trust” (Gill 189). Considering the fears that democracy could devolve quickly into mob rule if votes were cast on emotion rather than rationality, subjects that inculcated reasoning skills was useful, even if on the surface arithmetic had nothing to do with voting. On the other hand, the means of teaching and testing these subjects did little to facilitate connections between the classroom and other contexts. One must keep in mind, however, that no matter the rationales behind subjects, the education of the majority of lower and middle-class English students was confined to the 3Rs, even though few connections were made between the value of these subjects and the expectations of the school system. Even after the addition of class subjects to the curricular options, most schools only added grammar and geography, both with the purpose of passing the examinations.

Of course, the formal curriculum is not the only means of imparting skills and values. The *hidden curriculum*, referring to the unstated transmission of social norms in school settings, may not have been articulated until the 20<sup>th</sup> century United States, but its presence in American education is long-standing. In *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Bowles and Gintis claim that, “Different levels of education feed workers into different levels within the occupational structure and, correspondingly, tend toward an internal organization comparable to levels in the hierarchical division of labor” such that “the lowest levels in the hierarchy of the enterprise emphasize rule-following” (132). Jean Anyon’s seminal “Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work” confirmed this notion in late 20<sup>th</sup> century American schools, but Victorian teacher training manuals reflect this phenomenon as well; this connection should not be surprising given both societies’ capitalistic orientations. The structure of the school day and

instructions for teachers reveal the ways in which unspoken expectations for schools could be met outside the parameters of the formal curriculum.

Although most famous for basing grant aid on the pass rates of examinations in reading, writing, and arithmetic, the Revised Code did include provisions for ensuring the physical and moral health of students. Only schools that were “in connexion with some recognized religious denomination” or in which “the Scriptures are read daily from the authorized version” (*Report 1862* xvi) were eligible for grant consideration. Deductions from the grant could be made for “causes arising out of the state of the school,” including improper light and ventilation, lack of certified teachers, and “faults of instruction or discipline on the part of the teacher, or (after one year's notice) for failure on the part of the managers to remedy any such defect in the premises as seriously interferes with the efficiency of the school, or to provide proper furniture, books, maps, and other apparatus of elementary instruction” (*Report 1862* xxiv).

The lack of explicit attention to health in the formal curriculum, for example, obscures the attention paid by the educationists. They consider a healthy body and environment essential for learning because, in Gill's words, “As the brain is the organ of mind, its healthy condition is essential to success in education. The organ is affected by physical conditions, moral states, and intellectual activity” (Gill 57). Therefore, according to Gill, “The schoolroom should have a pleasant look about it. The associations with it should be agreeable” (81). He then spends great care detailing the proper conditions of the schoolroom down to the color of the walls, concluding that, “The best colour is a French grey,” as “glaring” colors “would be disagreeable, and nervous depression the result” (Gill 81). Equally specific instructions are given regarding ventilation, because “It is impossible that teachers can work many years in ill-ventilated rooms. The blood gets poisoned and loses its vitality; the nervous system becomes either thoroughly deranged, or

so weakened that the functions of the organs are discharged but feebly” (Gill 81). Even in a perfectly lit, colored, and ventilated room, students are in danger of falling prey to conditions of injurious health if the teacher does not closely observe and correct their posture throughout the day (Gill 60). According to Park, the “correct habits of the body” can also be enforced through breaks for physical exercises during the school day (85). In addition, teachers should daily inspect each student’s cleanliness, including their hands, face, hair, and clothes, with inquiries into the washing of their feet and teeth (Gill 60); any teacher who allows a lapse in hygiene “ought to be considered as unfitted for his office” (Park 9).

Additionally, the fact that each author front-loads his book with instructions on discipline, rather than pedagogy, reveals the importance educators placed on maintaining “good order” through the instillation of “right conduct.” Inspectors were instructed to observe these behaviors and report on the school's effectiveness in discipline. Prince reminds his readers of the relationship between discipline and school inspection, noting that

To meet the requirements respecting discipline, the managers and teachers are to take all reasonable care in the ordinary management of the school, to bring up the children in habits of punctuality, of good manners and language, of cleanliness and neatness, and also to impress upon the children the importance of cheerful obedience to duty, of consideration and respect for others, and of honour and truthfulness in word and act. They must satisfy the inspector that this is done. (44)

The authors are quite aware of the perceived need for the schools to conform lower-class children to the cultural standards of higher classes. Prince specifically states that the public elementary school has been established “for children of mechanics, artisans, and the poorer classes” (12). Gill warns that because students are drawn from these classes, the teacher is ever fighting the potentially immoral influences “of home and those of the streets” (iv). Park notes that after the establishment of the compulsory clauses, “our public elementary schools are attended by many children drawn from poor, vicious, neglected, and unhealthy homes” and thus

teachers should pay particular attention to the physical cleanliness of the students (Park 9); the necessity of attending to their spiritual cleanliness is implied throughout the book. In fact, Gill connects these virtues not just with intellectual advancement, but with advancement generally, claiming that, “Character is the source of success or failure in all pursuits” (86).

Perhaps the most efficient means of controlling a classroom, however, is the instillation of obedience, as in Prince's exhortation that, “The foundation of obedience to law is *the cheerful recognition of authority*” (41). References to “cheerful obedience” abound throughout these texts for the sake of maintaining order (Prince 41, 210; Gill 87), but also resonate with the class-relation discourses of duty and right feeling toward the other. Yet the educationists express concern about instilling the right kind of obedience. Gill notes three motivations for obedience: constraint (expectations of reward or punishment), habit (to be liked), and the most desirable motivation—respect for doing one's duty. Gill characterizes this as the “highest kind of obedience” in which the will is placed “under constraint, yet free, submissive yet independent... This implies the will is in unison with what is right,--that it proceeds from principle, not from habit or fear” (Gill 94). In so doing, Gill enters into the social discourse concerning the maintenance of right habits for the sake of duty. Indeed, Gill claims that “Moral instruction is imperfect which does not secure the application by the conscience to personal duty” (26). He considers school a microcosm of society at large, a place in which one learns obedience not through rule following “but by implanting a general rule or principle of conduct, that most good will be effected; *e.g.*, the sense of justice, if implanted in children, would exclude the necessity of prohibiting what would be a violation of it” because these habits “are alike necessary to their own happiness and to the well-being of society” (Gill 94).

Prince concurs, stating that “Observance of rules may be enforced temporarily, almost under any circumstances, by the resolute and systematic exercise of power; but this is not what is required” (Prince 41). Obedience out of a strong sense of duty, rather than “dread of punishment or hope of reward” is what is required (Prince 41). Prince and Gill both remind teachers that punishment, if needed to correct undesired behaviors, must be applied with the goal of instilling feelings of duty towards his fellows rather than fear of authority. Apparently responding to complaints of too harsh or retributive punishments dispensed in schools, Gill reminds teachers that “In awarding punishment of any kind, its design must be held in view,--of associating pain with wrong-doing, of seeking the child's good, not the gratification of the master's resentment, and of awakening cordial concern for the fault” (114). Prince agrees, noting that “The great object is to associate in the children's minds pleasure with right doing, and pain with wrong doing” (Prince 56). The instructions throughout these manuals explicitly identify obedience as means of instilling morality. Implicitly, however, they also prepare students for the working world by insisting on punctuality and compliance. In meeting these two aims, teachers relied on rotteness and automaticity, two conditions that do not adequately support the formation of democratically capable citizens, who, according to Victorian politicians, needed the capacity to think critically and reasonably.

### **Conclusion**

In thinking about English education, members of the educated elite tended to view education in its social context as a means of solving perceived national problems. Politicians, in contrast, tended to view education as a matter of policy, transforming the question from, “What *should* schools do?” to “What *can* schools do?” Politicians were additionally faced with practical



considerations, such as budgetary constraints. Because these were two different contexts for discussing education, differing terminology emerged. The expansiveness of <education is bread>, for example, narrowed to the practical concern of <efficiency>, prompting a divergent approach to education. However, this gap between expectation and policy is left unarticulated, creating conditions that would lead to disillusionment and the perception of a failing school system.

The need for <efficiency> narrowed the curriculum to its most basic and easily measured iteration. It is easier to test a student's ability to work a sum or decode a word than to measure his aptitude for reasoning or morality, both important factors for the <democracy> and <ignorance is a disease> components of public expectations. Although the Codes do make some provisions for public health by basing grant eligibility on the school's physical condition, they do not promote explicit health instruction. The expectation that education would impart concrete job skills to ease the students' transition into the working world is similarly unmet. The Taunton Commissioners stated that a general education was the best means of preparing students for the 'real world,' but the rotteness required by the exams does not adequately facilitate the deep thinking and knowledge transfer implicit in the Commissioners' argument. In this way, the school system could be read as a failure. The hidden curriculum to some extent compensates for the shortfalls in official policy by inculcating characteristics prized in lower class workers: obedience, punctuality, and contentment. However, the fact that middle-class students often attended lower-class schools further complicates efforts to evaluate a school's efficacy. Because of the predominant political belief that different social classes needed different forms of education, middle-class students attending schools intended for lower-class students would experience a curriculum too narrow for their needs.

## CHAPTER 5. IMPLEMENTING POLICY

In February 1891, an article in *The Standard* declared that “the word ‘pass’ was to be subordinate to the word ‘educate’” (“The New Education Code”). Responding to decades of criticism about the narrowing of curriculum necessitated in the Revised Code, the writer praised the Department of Education for caring “about the children at last, and not about the ‘percentage of passes’” and “addressing itself [illegible] the problem of how they may be educated with least pressure to themselves and with the greatest good to their country” (“The New Education Code”). Perhaps this was a bit optimistic, as the word *educate* does not appear at all in the New Code, but the newspaper articles celebrating the demise of the Revised Code reveal the rhetorical roots of problems in education reform. Having defined <efficiency> as the goal of education, as explored in Chapter 4, policymakers then needed a way to measure it, which required the defining of success and failure—a process that can only happen through language. This chapter focuses on how the rhetorical construction of accountability created illusions of success and failure in the public schools.

Specifically, <pass> acted as a terministic screen that channeled attention toward achieving arbitrary benchmarks rather than evaluating the school system within its greater institutional context. The narrow focus on *proving* school efficiency, in fact, undermined a school’s ability to become efficient. Though policies did make schools cheap and quick, they quickly became unsound because students were not, in the opinion of the inspectors, leaving equipped with the skills needed to enter the working world. First, the inspectors argued, the curriculum was too narrow and basic to be of much use beyond the classroom. Secondly, because the focus was on <pass>, teachers used uninspiring methods that would not instill a love of education to prompt future learning. The <pass>, then, the credential that was supposed to prove

a student had the necessary skills to enter adult life, actually prevented students from acquiring those skills.

To illustrate this, I begin by contextualizing the rhetoric of accountability through four major periods under the Education Codes: the Old Code, the Capitation Minute of 1853, the Revised Code of 1862, and the New Code of 1890.<sup>14</sup> Next, I analyze the language of these Codes, with particular attention to the invention of the <pass> under the Capitation Minute. I also use school inspector reports filed in the London area between 1840 and 1897 to trace the effects of that shift on three subjects: reading, arithmetic, and geography. I deviate from the 3Rs for two reasons. First, “writing” was not a stable subject and referred to “writing,” “handwriting,” “penmanship,” “composition,” and “spelling” interchangeably. Secondly, approaches to teaching geography appeared to undergo the most drastic changes in response to Code revisions, and they therefore expose the effect of those revisions most clearly. The <pass> terministic screen, I will argue, narrowed the focus of the school’s purpose at odds with social expectations. My analysis leads to the conclusion that the use of the <pass> as the primary school performance measure held individuals accountable for systemic problems, generating and reinforcing complex relationships between schools and public health, moral discourse, and the economy. Finally, I examine the New Code of 1890, which returned grant dispersals to a system similar to that of the Capitation Grant and which better incorporated social expectations.

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<sup>14</sup> These distinctions are somewhat of a polite fiction. “Old Code,” of course, only retroactively applied after the appearance of the Revised Code. The “Capitation Minute” was not an entire code unto itself but an addendum to the Old Code, and the first “New Code” appeared in 1870. For the sake of simplicity considering the scope of this project, I use “Old Code” to refer to regulations from 1840-1852, “Capitation Minute” those from 1853-1861, “Revised Code” for 1862-1889, and “New Code” from 1890-1897.

## The Old Code

Historians writing about Victorian education reform tend to leave the impression that Robert Lowe invented the school examination, but inspectors had been administering exams since the implementation of the first Education Codes in the early 1840s. In those years, grants were only available for the construction of new school buildings, not for recurring expenses such as building maintenance or teacher salaries. Inspections therefore closely focused on the school's sustainability, ensuring it would be able to remain solvent without further government aid. During inspection, then, the first priority was ascertaining the state of the district's and the school's finances (*Report 1840* 28).

Even so, academic matters received attention in the reports. The inspectors first noted the layout of the building and the classroom, the books and other "apparatus" used for instruction, the organization of the classes, and the pedagogical activities. In addition to these observations, the inspectors examined a selection of students in every subject taught. In reading, for example, inspectors were to mark if the student could read "imperfectly," "decently," "with ease and accuracy," or "with ease and expression" (*Report 1840* 30). By 1842, however, their tabulations used a different classification system, simply marking the number of students who were "Unable to read Words of Two Syllables" and those who were "Able to read with Ease" (*Report 1842* 172). A few years later the emphasis again shifted, this time marking those "Unable to read Words of Four Letters at Sight" against those who were "Able to read a verse in the Gospels without blundering" (*Report 1845* 14).

These reports thus provide a starting point from which to trace the opinion of educationists regarding the quality of public elementary school education in the London area. In their opinion, geography, which was taught in about half the schools, was one of the best-taught

subjects because teachers made it relevant and engaging. As HMI Rev. F.C. Cook explained in 1848, “Instead of making use of a list of strange names, and some ill-explained and unintelligible lessons...I now find the teachers, in nearly all of these schools, substituting easy and familiar lectures upon the causes and effects of physical phenomena, upon the social habits and political institutions of various nations, and upon other subjects of practical interest” (*Report 1848* 56). On the other hand, they continually complained that arithmetic was the worst tested subject because teachers struggled to find the balance between teaching automaticity and mathematical awareness. That is, students could generally perform the operations when given a sum such as  $3+2$  but could not apply the principle to problems,<sup>15</sup> though by the end of the 1840s, Inspector Cook noted, “In arithmetic the progress has been marked of late years, and is now rapidly advancing” (*Report 1848* 56). Little attention is paid to reading in the text of the reports, indicating general satisfaction, though in 1845 Inspector Cook does mention that improved pedagogy has subsequently improved the quality of reading and that “There is sufficient reason to hope that this improvement will be progressive” (*Report 1845* 140).

In response to increased demand for schooling, the Committee Council began issuing annual grants for school maintenance under the “Capitation Minute” of 1853, which provided a set number of shillings per student based on the average attendance. In order to receive the grant, however, three fourths of the students had to pass the academic examination. This wrought two important changes. First, all students, rather than a sampling, were subject to examination. Second, the <pass> was invented. Rather than describing student performances, inspectors

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<sup>15</sup> Inspectors used “sum” to refer to any straightforward arithmetic question that deployed numbers only. “Problem” referred, essentially, to word problems. I use the same vocabulary in this chapter.

evaluated the teaching of a subject as “Excellent, Well, or Fairly,” “Moderately,” or “Imperfectly,” with only the first two categories accepted as a <pass.>

Although inspectors reported a modest increase in reading and arithmetic, they did not view this as a result of the new examination requirements. To the contrary, Inspector Cook cautioned in 1857 that his summary of the students’ abilities “may not appear to be a high standard” but “when I look back a few years, and remember that only a small proportion of boys in the first classes of the largest schools could write down sums correctly, and work them afterwards without assistance; and that it was then very unusual to find a girls’ school in which the first class could make out an easy washing bill, I feel more gratified by the progress, than surprised at the defects which still exist” (*Report 1857* 240). The same year he wrote that many schools were awarded the mark of “good,” which meant “the elder boys or girls read with perfect fluency, accuracy, and correct expression” (*Report 1857* 237). This is somewhat remarkable considering the volume of complaints about the mechanical nature of students’ reading throughout the century, but his remarks remain consistent. In 1859 he affirmed, “My opinion as to the fluency and correctness of the reading in most good schools, the general intelligence and love of information in the boys, and the skill with which some teachers lead them to think and judge in matters not beyond their age, natural capacity, and the wants of their station, is upon the whole favourable” (*Report 1859* 21). He gives geography equally high marks, reporting in 1855 that “the progress is generally satisfactory. In fact, most persons who attend the examinations of good schools are surprised at the amount and the accuracy of the knowledge of physical and political geography, of manners, customs, &s., displayed by intelligent children of both sexes” (*Report 1855* 394). It is not known the proportion of “good schools” or “intelligent children,” so

this may be an instance of selective attention that does not represent the general experience. Even so, it indicates that the teaching of geography attended to an array of cultural matters.

The early years of the school inspections, then, paint a mostly positive picture. They did acknowledge that the quality can vary greatly from school to school and that not enough time was spent ensuring that lower division students mastered the fundamentals. On the whole, they reported, most students learn to read, write, and calculate well enough and the schools continue to improve in quality. According to Inspector Cook, the school system was “based on sound principles and is effecting an amount of good which, though not fully recognized by the organs of public opinion, is appreciated by the classes for whose benefit it was instituted, and is rapidly producing deep and abiding results in ameliorating the moral character and elevating the mental condition of the labouring population” (*Report 1856* 316).

### **The Revised Code**

Robert Lowe devised the Revised Code as a means to meet two mid-century concerns: provisions for education were inadequate and yet education expenditures were too high (Sylvester 43). The cost of the Crimean War put particular pressure on the Committee Council to reduce the grants currently distributed for the building of schools. Although most famous for basing grant aid on the pass rates of examinations in reading, writing, and arithmetic, the Revised Code included a host of other regulations. To even become eligible for a grant, schools had to meet specific conditions. The school must be either “in connexion with some recognized religious denomination” or one in which “the Scriptures are read daily from the authorized version” (*Report 1861* xvi), and the school must meet at least twice daily (*Report 1861* xxi).

Once eligibility criteria had been met, schools earned eight shillings<sup>16</sup> for every student who attended at least two hundred times per year (*Report 1861* xxii). From that eight shillings, two shillings and eight pence were deducted for each failure in reading, writing, and arithmetic (*Report 1861* xxii). Additional deductions could be made for “causes arising out of the state of the school,” including improper light and ventilation, lack of certified teachers, and “faults of instruction or discipline on the part of the teacher, or (after one year's notice) for failure on the part of the managers to remedy any such defect in the premises as seriously interferes with the efficiency of the school, or to provide proper furniture, books, maps, and other apparatus of elementary instruction” (*Report 1861* xxiv).

The origins of the Revised Code lie in the Newcastle and Taunton Commissions of the late 1850s and early 1860s, which both recommended examinations as a means of controlling for cost and quality. Though the members of the Newcastle Commission professed, “We believe that to raise the general character of the children, both morally and intellectually, is, and must always be, the highest aim of education; and we are far from desiring to supersede this by any plan of a mere examination into the more mechanical work of elementary education,” they nonetheless encourage the implementation of examinations alongside inspections because “the importance of this training, which must be the foundation of all other teaching, has been lost sight of” (Education Commission 320-321). They suggested that the State continue to pay out a grant based on certain conditions ascertained by the Inspectors (Education Commission 328). Secondly, each county would provide a grant based on an examination of acquired knowledge (Education Commission 328). The Newcastle commissioners were particularly charmed with the

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<sup>16</sup> One shilling in the late nineteenth century is roughly equal to five American dollars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; one pence is roughly equal to fifty cents.



potential efficacy of the examination, writing in their proposal that “the examination will exercise a powerful influence over the efficiency of the schools, and will tend to make a minimum of attainment universal” (Education Commission 338), and that “We believe that such an examination would be equally efficient in our humbler schools, and would impart a practical and real character to their teaching, which even the poorest child, paying in part for its education, has a right to expect” (Education Commission 341). Like the Newcastle Commission, the Taunton Commission also advocated for impartial examinations in which “schools should be tested in the work that they profess to do. It is not meant by this, that they should be encouraged or allowed to cram particular text books; on the contrary, it would probably be best that the questions should rarely be taken from the books that had been read; but the examination should be as far as possible adapted to the school work, and should not require the school work to be adapted to it” (Schools Inquiry Commission 622). Education would thus be made <sound> through the introduction of accountability ensuring all students reached a minimum level of proficiency and <cheap> by associating funding with exam results.

Though the Revised Code has been roundly criticized since its inception for its perceived negative impact on curriculum and pedagogy, its successes should be noted. The funding scheme provided by the Capitation Grant was unsustainable, just as the increased expense of outdoor relief necessitated the New Poor Laws of the 1830s. The Revised Code could thus be credited with ensuring the continuation of educational progress. By switching focus from class to individual examinations, it solved a problem the inspectors vociferously complained about: that upper division students were receiving superior instruction to lower division students. In addition, according to the inspectors, it created a more even quality of education throughout the London area. The Revised Code was therefore successful in accomplishing its objectives.

The reports, however, suggest a divide between the objectives of the policy and those desired by educationists. Though pass rates in the 3Rs rose slightly every year, the inspectors expressed constant dissatisfaction with student achievement, particularly reading and arithmetic. Though fluency was deemed sufficient for a pass, they complained nearly every year about the neglect of “style and expression” that resulted in mechanical performances (*Report 1869* 289). They considered arithmetic “the most unsatisfactory of all the Code subjects” because the standards were too high (*Report 1868* 134; *Report 1869* 291). The chief criticism was the students’ ability to work sums but not problems (*Report 1874* 132). Their reports on geography were mixed, though they indicate teachers had begun falling back on the memorization of facts rather than a holistic exploration of place. Even so, geography was almost always listed as one of the most successful subjects taught.

This begat a drop in <efficiency>, or the school’s ability to quickly impart useful skills and knowledge to students. The inspectors acknowledged a rise in examination passes but disputed that this indicated improvement in education. In 1865, HMI Rev. J. G. C. Fussell reported that “in most instances, not only has there been no improvement, but there has been a falling off in efficiency in many respects” (*Report 1865* 76). Two years later, he did find some areas of improvement but cautioned, “In expressing my satisfaction at the progress made by the schools in my district during the past year, I do not, however, intend to convey the impression that they are, as yet, in a higher or even as high a state of efficiency as under the Old Code” (*Report 1867* 75). Inspectors attributed this in part to the tyranny of the <pass> on which the school’s existence, and teachers’ livelihoods, depended. This critique came most forcefully from HMI Rev. W. Campbell, who admitted, “I have not been able, during my recent tours of inspection, to hide from myself the conviction that the one subject of almost every teacher’s

work is, not to send out from his school a boy or girl of acquired strength of character, of increased moral principle, of excellent intellectual attainments...but simply to make sure...that they shall ‘pass the inspector’” (*Report 1866 91*). Additionally, inspectors began understanding that the <pass>, conceived as a set of minimum standards, was being used in practice as the crest of student achievement (*Report 1867 78*).

Beginning in the mid-1860s, the word “mechanical” pops up throughout the reports to describe the students’ performances. The inspectors viewed this as a threat to the success of the school system. After all, the increase in the political franchise ultimately persuaded Parliament to pass the Elementary Education Act of 1870 to ensure a voter population with the literacy and critical thinking skills required for democratic participation. Moreover, as the education Commissions noted, not even the best school would be able to teach a student everything he would need to know in adult life; an important component of education was promoting a love of learning that would continue throughout the student’s life. This aspect of schooling had, according to the inspectors, been obliterated by the Revised Code. Inspector Campbell remarked,

There is very little heed taken to introduce boys of 12, 13, and 14, who are probably about to occupy a position in life in which a familiar acquaintance with such matters would make them more useful to their employers, and more able to become the authors of *their own* success in the world, a knowledge of geography of their own country comparatively with that of others, and the history of the development of the political and commercial progress which has made their nation so prosperous and prominent among the peoples of the new world. The result of what may be still called the new system of national education may have been the production of more widely extended *means of self education*, by the master of the mechanical subjects of instruction; but unless it can also secure a *taste* [emphasis in original] for carrying out this work on the part of lads who leave our best schools, it will, in my opinion have served its end but imperfectly. (*Report 1866 91*)

## The Problem with Passing

In contradistinction to the vision of the Taunton Commission, the exams did not measure what the public expected schools to accomplish. The underlying justification for the expansion of education rested upon the belief that education produced moral, healthy, and productive citizens. In limiting the <pass> to the performance of discreet skills, the members of the Committee also limited the practice of education. The inspectors became increasingly concerned that not only were students not equipped to enter the adult world upon leaving schools, they were similarly unequipped to figure out how to make that adjustment. Though not alone in his sentiments, Inspector Morrell in particular was distressed that “The watchword of the present day is to pay by results; but if the results we pay for represent no available mental growth it is a serious question whether in after-life they will not entirely fail of the purpose at which all primary education is supposed to aim,—I mean the culture and elevation of the individual” (*Report 1867* 261). The mechanical routine schools imposed upon students would “do very little to inspire the love of knowledge or the ambition for self-culture, and that we shall find the very scholars who have passed the Revised Code examination again and again with flying colours sinking back into that dead level of intellectual apathy from which all our educational schemes and improvements were designed to redeem them” (*Report 1860* 260).

Morrell’s comments most clearly demonstrate how <pass> acted as a terministic screen by channeling attention toward preparing students to pass exams rather than consciously preparing students to enter the adult world with correct moral attitudes and work-related skills. The justifications made for each subject included in the curriculum were not manifested in the examination process. Though the desire to measure outcomes precisely does reflect the general Victorian penchant for statistics and efficiency, it rendered schools inefficient due to the gap

between the rationale for accountability and the application of that accountability. Of equal concern is the indeterminacy of the language used. In *Interpretive Acts: In Search of Meaning*, Wendell V. Harris cautions that “reality is 'known' through reality-induced concepts that are expressed by language; language can be used to shift the boundaries of concepts; shifting the boundaries of any concept initiates a shift of greater or lesser significance within the total system of language; the shifting of the boundaries of concepts alters to some extent our grasp of reality” (9). Policymakers sought to create a reality in which schools were efficient or inefficient, passes or failures. This is already a precarious enterprise because of the way in which words act as screens between us and the nonverbal (Burke 5), filtering perceptions of reality. The language of accountability exacerbates this by denying guidelines for the proper labeling of student performances, creating a system in which terms were ever contingent upon each other but never defined.

It is necessary to linger on the specific terminology deployed around student achievement because it reveals an important way in which problems of education reform are problems of language, specifically what the language of accountability reveals about the purpose of accountability measures. When the only grants available were for the erection of new buildings, the language used to record student performance was entirely descriptive. Rather than evaluating the *quality* of the student’s performance, the inspector recorded his observation of the student’s performance. Observations, of course, are never neutral, as Burke makes clear (46), and the use of language always entails interpretation to some degree. Still, this system of scoring was relatively straightforward, as it involved only one layer of interpretation: observation to description. In contrast, beginning with the Capitation Minute, the language changed from descriptive to evaluative. This created another linguistic layer of interpretation: observation to

description to evaluation. This is problematic because results may become less consistent as additional steps in the interpretive process are imposed. Significantly, neither the Capitation Minute, the Revised Code, nor any sets of inspector instructions clearly define evaluative labels for the examination. In the 1863 instructions to inspectors, the Committee does set a benchmark for “fair”: “The word *fair* means that *reading* is intelligible, though not quite good; *dictation* legible, and rightly spelt in all common words, though the writing may need improvement, and less common words may be misspelt; *arithmetic*, right in method and at least one sum free from error” (*Report 1863* xxii). Though this instruction does provide a guideline of the standard, there are two deviations above fair and three below for which no guideline at all is offered. Inspectors were left to their own devices in interpreting what constituted an “Excellent,” “Good,” “Moderate,” “Imperfect,” or “Failure.” Furthermore, the “Imperfect” score was functionally the same as the “Failure” because both scores subtracted the same number of shillings from the available grant.

The inspectors themselves struggled with how to manage this indefiniteness, as the reports of Inspector Fussell show. In 1865, he criticized the definition of “fair” on the grounds that too much emphasis was placed on the reading being “intelligible” and not enough on the reading being “good.” He suggested, “If it were made to run ‘intelligent, though not ‘quite good,’ I believe it would express what was intended, and misconception would be obviated” (*Report 1865* 77). Note however, he bases this opinion on his personal interpretation of the standard without any further textual or contextual evidence. In the ensuing years, he continued to express discomfort with the vagaries that the guidelines allow. He commented in his 1867 report, “I have endeavoured to the best of my ability to interpret and carry out the provisions of the Revised Code in the sense and spirit in which I believed them to be been framed” (*Report 1867* 74). The

amount of ambiguity is striking: “endeavoured,” “best of my ability,” “sense and spirit,” “I believed.” These phrases suggest a lack of confidence in both the language of accountability and his own ability to apply those standards in his practice. A few years later, with no additional guidance having been offered, he wrote that “the reading is marked more highly than its intrinsic merit deserves both as regards articulation and intelligence. I am endeavouring gradually to raise my standard in these respects” (*Report 1869* 106). In so doing, he affirmed that standards were not fixed but fluid because he can, at his own discretion, define and redefine the language of accountability.

By 1871, his complaints were less about the language itself than the limits of that language in school evaluations. He noted that “a school which barely satisfies the official requirements is able to record as high a per-centage of passes, and receives as substantial a meed of approbation, as those which are justly marked ‘good’ or even ‘excellent’” (*Report 1870* 84). Though this lack of differentiation bothers Inspector Fussell, his grievance evinces the functionality of the <pass.> Even as it obscures student achievement, it creates the illusion of precision by defining a ‘cut mark.’ Under the descriptive model, there was no explicit judgment of school or students. Readers of the reports could decide for themselves if the percentage of students reaching a particular benchmark sufficed to render the school <efficient.> In contrast, that interpretative work is removed when a <pass> is marked without any further context. By creating a pass/fail binary, the Committee crafted an environment in which they could justify cutting school expenditure without the need for considering any context for, or even the meaning of, the scores. Indeed, Inspector Matthew Arnold argued that “The circle of the children's reading has thus been narrowed and impoverished all the year for the sake of a *result* at the end of it, and the *result* is an illusion” (*Report 1869* 137).

The consequences of relying primarily on these statistics became greater under the Revised Code because teachers felt pressured to ensure a <pass> to earn the grant money. The Revised Code arguably altered the mission of the public school by shifting the focus of accountability from well-disciplined classrooms to academic examinations with specific amounts of grant money tied to each passing grade. As Inspector Arnold reported,

The whole school felt, under the old system, that the prime aim and object of the inspector's visit was, after insuring the fulfillment of certain sanitary and disciplinary conditions, to test and quicken the intellectual life of the school...At present the centre of interest for the school when the inspector visits it is changed. Scholars and teacher have their thoughts directed straight upon the new examination, which will bring, they know, such important benefit to the school if it goes well, and bring it such important loss if it goes ill. (*Report 1864* 188)

The following year, an obviously frustrated Committee issued clarifications, stating that “The grant to be made to each school depends, as it has ever done, upon the schools’ whole character and work...It does not exclude the inspection of each school by a highly educated public officer, but it fortifies this general test by individual examination. If you keep these distinctions steadily in view you will see how little the scope of your duties is changed” (*Report 1863* xxviii). While it was true the grants could not be awarded to schools with ‘bad discipline,’ the reports show far less attention to such matters than they had before the Revised Code. Instead, most of the reports were filled with statistics about attendance, passes, and gender along with overall comments about the schools’ academics. Often those comments addressed various ways in which teachers learned to ‘game the system’ to earn the all-important <pass.>

Although teachers’ success in gaming the system called the examination statistics into question, the inspectors also questioned whether the methods of examination offered any meaningful feedback about the condition of the school in the first place. HMI C.H. Alderson complained that the exam structure, which relied heavily on 'skill and drill' measures, proved



inadequate for testing skills in any practical way (*Report 1866* 245). This was more than a philosophical stance. Inspectors often complained that the written nature of exams did not allow students to fully demonstrate their abilities. This deficiency was especially true in terms of history. Several inspectors complained that because children know more than they are able to express in writing, those exam scores were inaccurate (*Report 1872* 60; *Report 1873* 194). Furthermore, a pass provided no context, particularly regarding the appropriateness of the standards. In the same report in which Inspector Alderson complained about the impractical nature of exams, he declared, “A high per-centage of success shows that a school is taught certain things, and taught them accurately; but whether these things are the things which they ought to be learning, regard being had to their age, standing, and advantages, it wholly fails to show” (*Report 1866* 242).

Because individual pass rates were inadequate measures of student learning, the amalgamated number of pass rates were likewise useless in understanding each school's efficacy. In 1877, Inspector Alderson asked, “Do they mean, that so far as reading, writing, and ciphering are concerned, the children 'passed' have learnt what they ought to have learnt, know what they ought to know, regard being had to the age and standing of each?” (*Report 1877* 397). He argued the negative, insisting that “a 'pass' is a very indefinite exploit. It covers with a technical equality two mental feats as different from each other as a flying leap is from a scramble through” (*Report 1878* 397). HMI D.J. Stewart observed similar problems in his report of the same year. He noted that reading had more passes than any other subject “but it does not follow that the subject is taught as well as it might be” because “a great deal of what is called reading in elementary schools would be more accurately described as repeating from memory” (*Report 1878* 543).

The inspectors did on occasion acknowledge some value in the Revised Code. In 1889, for example, Inspector Sharpe attempted to defend payment by results against the public perception that “it contemplates the earning of the largest possible grant” by pointing out that the system had been designed so that “the subjects which carry money payment should be those best suited for the training of the moral and intellectual habits and for the development of the faculties.” He still had to acknowledge that “the course of study has been made subservient of the earning of money without reference to these ends by a low type of mechanical teaching” (*Report 1889* 376). Here Sharpe touches on a central tension in assessment: what the instrument is *assumed* to measure and what the instrument *does* measure. For example, reading had long been held as a means of forming proper moral and intellectual habits because it allowed students to “enter into” another’s experience and prompt feelings of sympathy and duty. Yet the exam only tested for decoding and, on occasion, a check for understanding of discreet words. While these skills are foundational for the higher cognitive functions desired from literacy, the structure of the examination system in effect made decoding and defining the end goal of reading rather than the starting point. Inspector Alderson expressed this frustration in his 1881 report, writing that “Subjects' which remain to the learner always subjects, instead of passing by the process of assimilation into his system, and forming a common fund of useful and durable *knowledge*, have no educational value” (*Report 1881* 178).

I turn to Domestic Economy to more specifically illustrate how the examination system distorted the value of subjects. Though inspectors occasionally praised the work being done, they more often expressed concerns about the amount and quality of work expected of young girls. First, as was the case with academic subjects, written exams were inadequate for assessing learning. Inspector Stewart suspected that, much like reading, answers given to examinations in

cooking were memorizations rather than honest expressions of knowledge (*Report 1879* 395). As Inspector Alderson points out, “Hundreds of girls are leaving school, able, indeed, to distinguish correctly between the nitrogenous, and carbonaceous elements of food, but with their power to cook a mutton chop or to dress a potato untested” (*Report 1881* 182). He blames this predicament on too many expectations placed on the Domestic Economy curriculum, which amounted to “the whole duty of woman in her relation to household responsibilities” (*Report 1881* 182). He asks, “When it is borne in mind that we are dealing with girls of 12 or 13, is it not rather premature to vex them with problems bearing on a cottage income, expenditure, and savings, which they can only answer out of a book?” (*Report 1881* 182). As Inspector Swettenham points out, “Cookery cannot be taught by lectures alone to girls 10 years old; they must practise it, and practise it often, if they are to remember it” (*Report 1877* 560). As with reading, domestic economy was an important subject that directly related to the female students’ adult life; it was therefore important to have some means of ensuring girls were being properly trained. Yet the exam did not in fact measure the skills the girls would need, such as preparing food, but rather relied on a written examination that could only test verbal knowledge.

### **System vs. Individual**

Analyzing the rhetoric of the <pass> throws into stark relief how examination systems hold individuals accountable for systemic problems. Beginning with the Capitation Minute, the context of the school ceased to be a consideration for grant allocation; only the results of student performance mattered. As a result, systemic problems were inefficiently dealt with, which reflects tensions between social expectations for education and education policy.

Even though <ignorance is a disease> was the controlling metaphor leading up to education reform, actual disease is rarely mentioned in these texts. Inspector Stokes noted that sometimes schools were under capacity due to “the prevalence of measles, scarlatina, or whooping-cough, which keep away from school not only the children actually ill, but their brothers and sisters and fellow lodgers” (*Report 1881* 440). Therefore, educationists emphasized the health and physical conditions of school buildings. Educationist Gill explained, apparently using a contemporaneous adage, “The mind and body are like a coat and its lining; if you ruffle the one, you ruffle the other” (Gill 11) and that neglect of the physical environment “as in inattention to exercise, ventilation, temperature, and cleanliness—is a fruitful source of inertness, indulgence, obtuseness, temptation, and moral weakness” (Gill 12). In this way, public health and education were intertwined, each needing the other to be successful.

In theory at least, schools were capable of supporting public health efforts. There were many aspects that needed attention in the minutest detail. Students should have 80 cubic feet (Prince 7). Schoolrooms should be kept, at least in winter, at 62 degrees (Prince 11). Walls should be lightly colored blue or grey to reduce eye strain and increase mood (Prince 11). Knowing that “used-up air is to be got rid of” (Prince 186), methods of proper ventilation were central to teacher training. One teacher training manual went so far as to include specific calculations for obtaining the proper amount of ventilation (Prince 10). If the building could not be well-ventilated, teachers were expected to open all the windows twice a day (Prince 186). Additionally, teachers were expected to keep the classrooms impeccably clean, with the floors and walls swept once or twice a day, desks dusted daily, and floors and seats washed weekly (Prince 14; Prince 187) because “Things which are not clean give off foul gas, which causes fever, &c.” (Prince 187). The physical condition of the building was so essential to the running

of a school, teacher certification exams included questions such as “Explain clearly the value of pure air for health, the necessity of ventilation in a schoolroom, and describe any good system of ventilation for an elementary school with which you are personally acquainted” (Prince 186).

Unsurprisingly, schools often fell short of these ideals. HMI R.P.A. Swettenham complained that some schools were never washed on the rationale the children would merely dirty them up again (*Report 1877* 559). On the other hand, sometimes the cleaning regimen interfered with the health of the students, as Inspector Sharpe shared, “I have sometimes noticed that scholars are kept waiting in the rain outside the school till the hour for opening school, because the room requires to be ventilated and tidied; the parents no doubt contract the habit of keeping their children away from school or sending them at a later hour, when they are sure to find the school open” (*Report 1889* 353). Even the actual structure of the building could serve as an impediment, as in the case of the Kirby Street Board School “having no access on any side but one, and that one an access extremely inconvenient and improper for children, the school is of very little use indeed” (*Report 1881* 439). Although Inspector Stokes does not detail the nature of the building's impropriety, this most likely referred to the angle of staircases, as many reports include concerns about stairways deemed too steep for children to climb safely.

Despite some vivid examples of schools' shortcomings, the conditions had improved from the days of the fatal Yorkshire style schools<sup>17</sup> at the beginning of the era, and inspectors note that whatever oversights may happen, schools were healthier, cleaner spaces than the students' homes. Inspector Stokes sympathized with complaints about the sometimes grungy conditions of schoolrooms exacerbated by the uncleanliness of its students, but contended it was

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<sup>17</sup> These schools, made famous in novels such as *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Jane Eyre*, operated under austere conditions; malnutrition and disease plagued these institutions.

better to collect all the dirt into one building than dispersed among many (*Report 1872* 167). Inspector Sharpe epitomizes the philosophy that the perfect should not be the enemy of the good, as he enumerates the ways in which conditions may be suboptimal but nevertheless concludes that “many thousands of the poor children of London find a comfortable refuge from the dirty street and close family room in a spacious, well-lighted, cheerful school” (*Report 1892* 415). In the 1880s, fears grew that students were becoming “overpressured” by the curricular and time demands schools placed upon them. Some inspectors dismissed these fears that students were spending too much time at school by pointing out that the school building was a healthier environment than that of their homes (*Report 1883* 380).

In addition to maintaining clean buildings, teachers were also charged with enforcing the cleanliness of their students to prevent the spread of diseases. Educationist Prince wrote, “The law has done during late years, and is still doing, much towards improving the sanitary conditions of the people; but teachers have it in their power to go to the very root of the evil” (Prince 190). He explains teachers are in this unique position because “Much of the neglect and dirt of the poorer population arises from their ignorance of its fatal effects” (Prince 190). By modeling and explaining the relationship between cleanliness and health, and inspecting the condition of each student daily, teachers had the opportunity to further support the mission of public health. Prince insists on the “Necessity of teacher inspecting skin, hair, clothing, &c., of pupils to see if clean, free from disease, symptoms, &c. Necessity of teacher trying to lead his scholars to see the effects of uncleanliness—causes of all fevers, &c” (Prince 188). Educationist Park considered this inspection to be one of the most important components of a teacher's job because “our public elementary schools are attended by many children drawn from poor, vicious, neglected, and unhealthy homes, the importance of creating a regard for neatness and cleanliness

in the minds of the children, in relation to health and character, must never be lost sight of. Every teacher should insist upon the absolute cleanliness, and a teacher who fails to do this ought to be considered as unfitted for his office” (Park 9). The enforcement of these policies paid off, as Inspector Sharpe noted in 1897: “Cleanliness and neatness are rapidly becoming the rule of school life in the poorest neighbourhoods; thirty years ago the weekly pinafores are now the common allowance, and a poor woman will often wash out overnight her child's pinafore” (*Report 1897* 264).

The “disease” expressed in <ignorance is a disease>, of course, also referred to moral contagion. Gill spends the opening pages of *Introductory Text-book to School Education, Method, and School Management* vociferously arguing in favor of moral education on the grounds that a person intellectually educated without a firm moral education would be a danger to society (13). Gill explicitly rejects the idea that ignorance and crime bear any connection on the grounds there is nothing about academic subjects that would increase moral feeling (13). His attitude is typical, with most educationists and inspectors insisting that moral training could assist with intellectual training, but insisting on evaluating each separately. Inspectors generally praised the moral instruction in the schools. Inspector Arnold often complained that “The great fault of the instruction in our elementary schools (of the secular part of it, at any rate) is, that it at most, gives to a child the mechanical possession of the instruments of knowledge, but does nothing to *form* him, to put him a way of making the best possible use of them” (*Report 1872* 24), but according to the other reports, despite the constraints of the curriculum, moral training was successful. For example, in 1877, Renouf reported, “the behaviour of the children in the streets is much improved within the last three or four years...There is undoubtedly very much cause for satisfaction at this advance of civilization, which is owing in great part to the action of

the schools” (*Report 1877* 499). In 1893, Sharpe praised the schools in that “it would be difficult to over-estimate the good behaviour and disciplined conduct of nearly all our London schools. Habits of self-restraint, respect for each other and for their teachers, good-tempered helpfulness, kindness to the afflicted, and many other good qualities are the fruit of the system of primary education which has grown up like all other English institutions, with the consent and good-will of the people” (*Report 1893* 114).

What went largely unnoticed by much of the public, however, was that school is not the only influence that plays a role in shaping children. Interestingly, educationists and inspectors have different opinions about the severity of the situation, with the former more optimistic about what schools can accomplish. For example, although Prince conceded “influences of the world—its intercourse, employments, pleasures, trials, temptations, and disappointments... do more in the formation of his character than is possible for the school,” he insists “that the precise effect of the influences he meets with in the world will depend on the preparation which his early training has given him to meet them, on the principles it has implanted, and on the habits it has formed” (Prince 11). The inspectors were more keenly aware of the limitations of the four schoolroom walls. Inspector Sharpe, for example, observes, “Good manners and good language are the almost invariable rule inside of the school walls, however much they may be weakened out of school hours by the influence of the home or the street” (*Report 1897* 264). The acknowledgement of the effects of forces beyond the school reveal areas in which expectations for schools eclipsed their abilities. The school is set up for “failure” when it is being held responsible for behavior that is shaped by a variety of forces outside the control of educational institutions.



Educationists and inspectors were keen to point out that family discourses were more influential than the school could ever be. For example, in 1889, Inspector Sharpe went out of his way to clarify he can only attest to children's behavior at the school because “it is sometimes argued that the teacher is responsible for his scholars out of school hours. The scholar is handed over to the teacher, who stands *in loco parentis* at the opening of the school, and he is handed back to the parents at the close of that time” (*Report 1889* 362). For this reason, Inspector Sharpe chided those who thought schools should accomplish more, claiming, “England owes a debt of gratitude to the teachers who treat the drunken mother and her neglected child with a patient courtesy deserving of high praise” (*Report 1895*, 148). Similarly, Inspector Renouf claimed, “Their education is almost entirely confined within the school hours. The vocabulary of their families is extremely limited. Home influences are destructive of school influences” (*Report 1877* 498). For this reason, educationist Park recommends teachers cultivate personal relationships with parents to “secure the hearty co-operation and influence of the parents in the training and education of their children” (13).

The school system also had to contend with its function in the economic system. Even though board schools tended to attract more of the 'deserving' poor, truancy remained a large problem. Apparently, some members of the public chalked this up to an inability to pay the fees that were charged. The inspectors dismiss this assumption, as Inspector Stewart does in 1883, explaining that those who have fees waived are the most likely to be truant and, “The emptiest school is that which imposes the lowest fee” (*Report 1883* 392). In this same report, Inspector Stewart blames this recalcitrance on members of the “thriftless, improvident class always trying to reap where others have sown” who have “no thirst for education” and constantly move as a means of “evading regular employment while pretending to look for it” (*Report 1883* 392).

Other inspectors, however, acknowledged that economic status was a valid hindrance to education. As early as the 1840s Inspector Arnold shared a story he had heard regarding the tension between work and school. He informed the Committee, “Last year I heard of many instances in which, partly from solicitude for the children’s health, partly from a wish for their mental improvement, the parents have been sincerely anxious to save them from exposure to bad weather, and to send them to the village school” rather than working in the fields, but the employers denied the parents’ requests (*Report 1848* 52). Inspector Cook suggested in the 1850s that the Committee should offer prizes “or even annual payments” to students to make remaining in school a more attractive prospect (*Report 1854* 345). Two decades later, however, the situation remained largely unchanged. In 1873, Inspector Sharpe noted that schools located in the poorest neighborhoods have their success stymied by “the occupation necessitating frequent migrations of work” (*Report 1873* 191). Though he deemed this an unreasonable excuse for missing school, he listed reasonable absences as well, all related to economic necessity: taking care of younger siblings, laundering, running errands and other forms of employment (*Report 1873* 191).

This demonstrates how economic institutions that should benefit from schools undermine their efforts. After all, the school was expected to inculcate both the moral conditioning and technical skills required for a productive transition into the adult working world. Yet because many children were already a part of that working world due to economic necessity, they were unable to receive that training. Many children received inconsistent educations as both students and workers because of the demand that they occupy both roles simultaneously. Anxieties about incomplete training revealed themselves in the late century complaints about truancy. Responding to complaints about perceived failures of the school system, Inspector Sharpe

reminds the reader that the ideal of the public school system “rests upon the understanding that every child over five years of age...shall unless legally exempt attend punctually and regularly at every meeting of the school which his parent may have selected” (*Report 1897* 261). Inspector Arnold viewed this as the primary weakness of the English school system; the Committee attempted to improve education by tweaking the Revised Code, which would do nothing to alleviate the truancy problem (*Report 1874* 28). Inspector Sharpe had so little regard for the education dictated by the Revised Code he asserted that the only meaning to be derived from a student passing the sixth standard was that “throughout its life its education has not been obstructed nor retarded by sickness, work, change of home, or any home circumstances” (*Report 1873* 192).

### **The New Code**

The Committee was not entirely unresponsive to the complaints of the inspectors. After almost a decade under the Revised Code, the Commission began tweaking the funding scheme. In 1870, schools were awarded 4s per pass in addition to a fixed grant 6s per student based on average attendance. In 1882 the merit grant was introduced, presumably to address the problem of teaching only to the <pass.> Under this Code, each “fair” earned 2s, “good” earned 4s, and “excellent” 6s in addition to the fixed grant of 9s per students based on average attendance. The New Code of 1890, lauded by journalists, returned to the Capitation Minute’s procedure of examination by sample. The members of the Committee thought this to be a “more simple and effective” means of distributing grant money. Schools could either earn a 12s6d fixed grant or 14s merit grant based “on the accuracy of knowledge and general intelligence of the scholars in the elementary subjects” (*Report 1890* 132), as well as 1s fixed grant or 1s6d merit grant for

discipline and organization. The New Code emphasized “special regard to the moral training and conduct of the children, to the neatness and order of the school premises and furniture, and to the proper classification of the scholars, both for teaching and examination” (*Report 1890* 132), as well as the importance of bringing up “children in habits of punctuality, of good manners and language, of cleanliness and neatness, and also to impress upon the children the importance of cheerful obedience to duty, of consideration and respect for others, and of honour and truthfulness in word and act” (*Report 1890* 132). The New Code thus begins more explicit incorporation of social expectations. Although schools had always had to prove specific physical conditions that would promote student health in order to be grant eligible in the first place, the demands regarding the student’s moral development had been vague and perfunctory.

The inspectors responded enthusiastically to the changes. Inspector Brodie noticed just two years after the implementation of the New Code of 1890, “The result has been already an infusion into the routine of work a brightness, elasticity, personal interest and enthusiasm on the part of teachers and children absolutely unknown before” (*Report 1893* 26). In 1894, Inspector Sharpe reported that “The teaching of most of the ordinary school subjects manifests a steady improvement, both in the methods employed and in the greater freedom and comfort with which the schools are conducted” (*Report 1894* 109). The following year, Inspector Hitchings extolled, “The greater freedom given to managers and teachers in recent codes, the stress that is laid on the cultivation of the intelligence, and the disappearance of the financial need of passing each child in the three elementary subjects, must tend to raise the quality of the teaching. The children now seem to be more interested in their school work, and to understand it better than they did formerly, and at the same time there is no diminution in the accuracy of the work” (*Report 1895* 60).

Their accounts of individual subjects paint a more mixed picture. It appears in the early years, schools experienced a hangover from the Revised Code as geography remained rote (*Report 1891* 383), students had stopped attempting the problem on arithmetic exams (1891 365), and expression in reading continued to exasperate inspectors (*Report 1891* 364-365). By 1895, however, geography was claimed to be “well taught,” if too dependent upon book work (*Report 1895* 58) and arithmetic problems were no longer “systematically neglected” (*Report 1895* 10). Reading, though, continued to be a sticking point for inspectors. Inspector Synge, interestingly, blames this on the definition of good reading. He asks the Committee to consider, “We have asked for expressive reading, and in many cases we get instead, not reading which shows at once that the reader understands and is alive to the meaning of what he reads, but a memory of the inflexions of the teacher’s voice” (*Report 1895* 57).

To say that removing the tyranny of the <pass> alone improved the condition of schooling is to overstate its contribution. In every decade from 1840 to 1880, members of the Committee made improvements to the training, licensing, and employment of teachers. In 1880, Parliament passed Mundella’s Act, which made school attendance compulsory for every child between five and ten years old. During that decade, the Committee released study aides for the exams, and the newly invented blackboard greatly increased the efficacy of handwriting and geography instruction. Still, according to the inspector reports, de-emphasizing the <pass> broadened the ways in which teachers could use those tools.

### **Conclusion**

The changes in the evaluation of English schools in the mid and late nineteenth century reveal the inherently rhetorical nature of education reform. Thinking specifically about

accountability measures, the terminology deployed in interpreting examinations obfuscated, rather than clarified, the quality of education provided in the schools. Although the <pass> was created to ensure <efficiency,> many inspectors felt efficiency decreased because the focus of teachers shifted from a more holistic approach to one that privileged the skill-and-drill required of examinations. The terminology used to incentivize teachers thus played a formidable role in shaping the lived experience of schooling for students. This situation also arose from the layers of interpretation required in moving from description to evaluation that created the “indefinite exploit,” which lacked any sort of objective definition, forcing rationales behind examination grades to remain entirely contingent upon each other. The <pass> also allowed for the illusion of either success or failure, as it was never clearly defined.

Another way to think about the rhetorical nature of education reform is by considering the alignment, or lack thereof, between social expectations and official policy. As set forth in Chapter 3, there were specific expectations that schools could decrease crime, increase public health, strengthen the economy, and preserve political stability. Chapter 4 scrutinized the complications in turning those expectations into a curriculum, particularly as <efficiency> became the driving force. The present chapter found a further hindrance to meeting social expectations, as the accountability system shifted focus toward the <pass.> In each of these phases, different terms have shaped beliefs about what schools should accomplish, but these changing beliefs were not clearly communicated. The public outcry against payment by results, for example, stemmed from the assumption that the policy was designed to ensure the meeting of social expectations, when in fact the policy was responding to an entirely different set of pressures. The failing school, then, was not an objective occurrence but the result of a disjuncture between the way the *public* talked about education and the way *policymakers* talked about

education. This suggests that frustration with public schools stems, at least in part, from a misplaced assumption that there is any necessary connection between what the public believes schools should do, and what schools are, in fact, designed to do.

## CHAPTER 6. RESONANCES TODAY

The metaphors and terministic screens deployed in education reform debates set expectations for the school system through the process of naming and framing, which suggests education reform is a rhetorical problem as much as a socioeconomic one. The language used in these screens does not necessarily remain consistent among the general public, educationists, and policymakers, which contributes to the belief that the school system is failing to achieve its purposes. In the Victorian era, three metaphors drove the expectations of the general public: <ignorance is a disease> (hygiene and morality), <education is bread> (economic independence and capitalistic values), and <students are fields> (democracy). While the commissioners charged with recommending state-level educational policies did not make explicit arguments about the problems education would solve, they implicitly focused on the economic utility of education, with particular attention to the need for <efficiency>. In so doing, they suggested policies that would meet the needs inscribed in <students are fields>, but largely ignored the other social expectations. Finally, the policymakers shifted the goalposts altogether. They identified two problems: quality and cost. These are concerns that narrow the outlook to the school as a world unto itself, not socially connected as the previous two processes. The framing, as driven by the terministic screen of official education policy, was <passing>, which encouraged the standardization of student achievement. Yet other stakeholders, particularly school inspectors, seemed to be operating under the assumption schools should function under a model more closely aligned with the social functions of schooling as reflected in the metaphors and deployment of <efficiency>. The pushback against the testing regime was not against accountability measures *per se* but against the efficacy of those measures in solving the public problems. Those policies were not designed to meet those social needs, however, illustrating a gap that often exists between the language used to



project hopes onto education and the language of education policy. Nor is the phenomenon limited to the past. The same fantasies of education as the savior of the nation continue to appear in American discourse. After briefly tracing the thematic fantasies of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century presidential candidates, I focus on the (literal) debates over George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind bill, signed in 2002. Finally, I reflect on the significance of these themes, concluding that the seeming stagnation of education reform conversations may be due to three insoluble conditions of public schooling in capitalistic societies.

### **Fantasies of Schooling**

Though the preservation of democracy ultimately secured provisions for England's centralized school system, that thread has largely been lost in American discourse. In the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, one of the first federal documents to comment upon education, legislators supported the establishment of a public university on the grounds that "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." Up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the community-based schools essentially worked toward those ends, with curricula centered on reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion (Alas and Jackson 10). In fact, the first state-level provisions for education were founded in Massachusetts's 1647 "Old Deluder of Satan Act" (Jackson 45). During the social and economic upheavals of the Industrial Revolution, school leaders contended that the function of schools had changed to modernizing the skills and values of children who would become workers in a changing society (Tyack 29). This, the reformers argued, necessitated modeling schools after factories and implementing high-stakes testing in order to classify students efficiently (Tyack 41-45)—trends that intensified in the first decades of the

twentieth century (Tyack 188; 208-212). The shift to thinking about schools in terms of economic support has nearly monopolized the conversation. During the twentieth and twenty-first century presidential debates, not a single candidate mentioned the pursuit of democracy as a warrant for education.

Rather, the economy and morality have dominated American political discourse in similar ways to the Victorian era. As reflected in the metaphor <education is bread> and the suggested curricula from the Newcastle and Taunton Commissions, many Victorians viewed education as a boon to the economy. The notion that education will *ipso facto* improve the economy continues to be asserted without any gesture toward *how* that connection functions in practice. Occasionally candidates suggest that education is equivalent to job training, as Nixon did in the 1960 Washington D.C. debate, noting that the highest rates of unemployment occurred “among those who are inadequately trained; that is, those who do not have an adequate opportunity for education.” This theme crops up through the years, for instance when Mondale said at the 1984 Louisville debate, “Certainly education and training is crucial. If these young Americans don't have the skills that make them attractive to employees, they're not going to get jobs.”

In most cases, the link in the chain that connects a good education with a good economy is ignored. During the 1960 Chicago debate, Kennedy claimed, “There is no greater return to an economy or to a society than an educational system second to none” (*Presidential...Chicago*). In 1992, George H.W. Bush defended himself against accusations of not responding to a recent recession with, “But I think in terms of the recession, of course, you feel it when you're President of the United States. That's why I'm trying to do something about it by stimulating the export, investing more, better education system” (*Presidential...Richmond*). During that same election season, Bill Clinton bolstered his presidential run by pointing to Arkansas's improved economy

during his governorship, which he credited to his belief in “investing in education and in jobs” (*Presidential...St. Louis*). George W. Bush took it the furthest in a 2004 debate, suggesting that “the best way to keep jobs here in America and to keep this economy growing is to make sure our education system works... You know, education is how to help the person who has lost a job. Education is how to make sure this—we've got a workforce that's productive and competitive” (*Presidential...Tempe*). This perspective justified his claim that “the No Child Left Behind Act is really a jobs act when you think about it” (*Presidential...Tempe*).

Appeals to morality are even more pronounced, if not so eloquently stated as in the Victorian metaphor <ignorance is a disease>. Time and again, presidential candidates decry the erosion of American values and call for their promotion in schools. George H.W. Bush lamented in 1988, “we've seen a deterioration in values, and one of the things that I think we should do about it in terms of cause is to instill values into the young people in our schools. We got away, we got into this feeling that value- free education was the thing” (*Presidential...Winston-Salem*). The notion that “value-free education” hurt society continued to plague Republicans up to and including the 2000 debate. McCain was enamored by a charter school in Phoenix that read from *The Children’s Book of Virtue*, prompting him to claim that “the virtue of the month as exemplified in the Ten Commandments could be and should be taught in every school in America” (*Republican...Phoenix*). Not to be outdone, George W. Bush proffered, “I also believe our schools ought to expand character education. I think it’s a good for the federal government to encourage school districts through joint venture money to have character education that teaches children right from wrong, good from bad, the basic values of life” (*Republican...Johnston*). When directly asked if education was a moral issue, Bush responded, “Well, I'm saying education is an incredibly

important issue and if we don't educate our children, we're going to have real moral problems” (*Republican...Columbia*).

The morality of education extended beyond curriculum, however. Education policy itself was framed as a moral issue. Both Democrats and Republicans considered education a matter of civil rights. At the 2000 debate in Johnston, Iowa, Keyes intoned, “So, the first thing we have to do is restore our allegiance to those moral principles that restore that moral confidence on the basis of which we reclaim control of our schools. To symbolize that reclaimed control, my goal would be to abolish the Department of Education, and to make it clear that is primarily the leadership of the parents — not any level of government — that we have to rely on in this society” (*Republican...Johnston*). A few minutes later, Forbes added, “And one of the great tasks of the president is not just to have programs, but to create an environment where the American people can experience a spiritual and moral renewal... And then, other proposals like allowing you to choose your own schools, this is to give you...power over your own lives, and to restore America” (*Republican...Johnston*). Thus morality began not with the inculcation thereof in students, but by the way the system itself was structured.

The way in which the education system was interpreted as a moral system reflects the influence of capitalism on both Victorian and contemporary American societies, specifically the values of private enterprise and competition. This comparison becomes particularly acute when examining the rhetoric of the 2012 Republican presidential primary. Rand Paul pointed out, as do many conservatives, “The Constitution is very, very clear. There is no authority for the federal government to be involved in education” (“Full Transcript”). Therefore, many reference the Tenth Amendment and demand the dismantling of the Department of Education. Rick Santorum promised, “In fact, we should repeal all of federal government's role in primary and secondary

education, and if you give me the opportunity, I'll do that" ("GOP N.H."). Michelle Bachman contended, "We have the best results when we have the private sector and when we have the family involved" ("Republican Debate"). Jon Huntsman spoke with more specificity, claiming "We need to take education to the local level, where parents and local elected officials can determine the destiny of these schools. Nobody wants their schools to succeed more than local elected officials and their parents" ("Fox News/Google"). It should come as no surprise that in essentially deregulating the public school system, Republicans tend to equate running a school with running a private company. Santorum clearly spelled this out during the Fox News/Google debate declaring, "The bottom-line problem with education is that the education system doesn't serve the customer of the education system. And who's the customer? The parents, because it's the parents' responsibility to educate the children." Part and parcel of this ideology of private enterprise is the necessity of competition. Mitt Romney advocated in favor of school vouchers because he wants "school choice to see who's succeeding and failing" ("Full Transcript"). This conjures up images of schools driven out of business, boarded up like so many mom and pop stores after WalMart moves into a community. Newt Gingrich's rhetoric was slightly more optimistic, claiming "If every parent in America had a choice of the school their child went to, if that school had to report its scores, if there was a real opportunity, you'd have a dramatic improvement" ("Republican Debate").

This line of reasoning directly echoes that of Robert Lowe, architect of "payment by results." In response to the Taunton Commission's recommendation for providing schools with stable funding through endowments, Lowe asserted that

the commissioners assume as perfectly self-evident that the ordinary principles of political economy are quite inapplicable to the education of the middle and upper classes; that the people of this country are not to be trusted with the instruction of their own children; that it is the duty of the State to determine for them what that instruction ought

to be, and then to bribe them by pecuniary inducements to submit to the instruction so provided. They assume, also, that it is possible to secure under endowments all the zeal and devotion which are generally supposed to be obtained by competition alone, and that a board of governors presiding over and administering an endowment will be just as industrious and efficient as if their private and personal interest were involved in its success or failure...it is not a light thing to override without attempting to refute the opinion of Adam Smith on any economical subject, nor the cogent and vigorous arguments by which that opinion is supported. (“Mr. Robert Lowe”)

The similarity in positioning education as a product best supplied through the free market suggests that appeals to the economy and morality appear so dominantly because they are intertwined in conservative ideology.

Unlike the Victorian era, public health has rarely been part of the conversation about schooling in American discourse in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with one exception: the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. Moderators gave significant time in the 1992 debates to questions about stemming the epidemic; every candidate proffered “education” as an answer. This suggests that advances in public health have diminished the perception of schools as a place to promote physical health, when the fear of physical contagion increases, schools are still looked upon as the institution to “fix it” in the same way the Victorian metaphor <ignorance is a disease> implied.

### **No Child Left Behind: Purpose to Policy**

The narrative about education in the years leading up to No Child Left Behind was coherent if not cogent: America was in a moral crisis—both socially vis a vis school violence and structurally vis a vis failing schools created by an anti-capitalist system. Thus the problem is named as a systemic failure and framed in terms of capitalism, in which <choice> would eliminate <failing schools> because <measurement> would operate on free market principles. Integrating the public school system into the free market by holding schools accountable through standardized testing would thus boost the economy and make more moral citizens.

In the Republican primary of 2000 John McCain and George W. Bush took the lead in shaping the education reform conversation. In the first primary debate, McCain announced, “Education in America has become a civil rights issue. The very wealthy in our society get the best education in the world; the very poor in our society obviously are getting the worst. The conditions in our schools are still deplorable. We need choice and competition in education” (*Republican...Durham*). “Choice and competition” were practically his mantra, parroted in nearly every answer to an education question. In the first primary debate, he linked “choice and competition” to education reform four separate times. In the next debate, he insisted, “...we have to have choice and competition in our schools in order to improve our school system” (*Republican...Dartmouth*). In a primary debate in Johnston, Iowa, McCain asserted, “Choice and competition, that's the answer. And I think that we will be well served to use those as our principles” (*Republican...Johnston*). He continued the theme in the second Manchester debate, insisting, “But the point is that if we have choice and competitions, charter schools, voucher programs, merit pay for teachers based on student performance, then we will give every American parent the choice that they deserve. And that is to send their child to the school of their choice” (*Republican...Manchester, Jan*). In foregrounding <choice> as the key to successful education reform, McCain names the issue as subpar schooling and frames the issue in terms of the free market. <Choice> selects autonomy as sacrosanct and reflects the American value of individualism. In using this screen, McCain introduces a tension in the conversation about education reform. While <choice> promotes individual freedom and connotes an ability to separate from public systems, the school system is an inherent component of the public sphere. Much like the effect of standardized testing analyzed in Chapter 5, <choice> allows individuals to be held accountable for systemic failures.

His biggest rival, Bush, did make appeals to <choice> on occasion—a total of four times during the primaries. Bush’s main focus, however, was on <measure>, which he repeated as often as McCain repeated <choice>. He first introduced this concept in the Johnston debate, asserting, “We must ask school districts and states that accept federal money to develop on their own...an accountability system. We must measure” (*Republican...Johnston*). At the final primary debate, Bush declared, “Accountability is the core to success. In order to make sure children are not left behind, it's important to measure so we can correct problems early before it's too late” (*Republican...Los Angeles*). In addition to benefitting the students through instruction driven by the testing data, Bush envisioned direct benefits to the parents as well. He had explained his views during the first Manchester debate, declaring, “the schools that receive federal money to help disadvantaged students, must measure the results. If the students improve, the schools will be rewarded. If not, the parents will be free to make a different choice for their students, their children” (*Republican...Manchester, Dec*). His statement clarifies his vision that <measure> would promote <choice> by providing parents with concrete information from which to judge their local schools. While Bush believed in the value of choice and competition, he expressed skepticism in their efficacy absent the ability to measure a school’s effectiveness.

Lest we presume appeals to the free market were a Republican-only appeal, Al Gore, the Democrat most engaged with education issues, similarly vaunted choice and competition. Although he consistently derided voucher programs, he declared at the NBC “Meet the Press” primary debate, “I favor competition within the public school system. I favor more choice for parents to send their children to whatever school they want to send them to” (*Democratic...NBC*). During the first presidential debate, he reiterated, “I believe parents need more public and charter school choice to send their kids to a safe school” (*Presidential...Boston*). Though he protested



policies that would decrease funding to traditional public schools, his explicit support for school choice illustrates how similar Republican and Democratic proposals for education reform were.

<Choice> was not, however, his dominant terministic screen. Rather, Gore's comments focused on the <failing school>. He was the only candidate to use this screen more than once, and he deployed it nearly a dozen times over the course of the election season, at least once in each debate. In the first Democratic primary, Gore declared, "I think that we need to turn around these failing schools in the inner city and elsewhere" (*Democratic...Nashua*). In the next debate, he tied education to civil rights, declaring, "That's why I support the most vigorous enforcement of the civil rights laws. That's why I think that we have got to turn around failing schools in the communities that don't have them" (*Democratic...NBC*). Oftentimes, Gore referenced <failing schools> as "traps," as he did in the Des Moines primary debate, asserting, "No child in this country should be trapped in a failing school" (*Democratic...Des Moines*). During the first presidential debate, he even attacked Bush's policy over a perceived weakness, noting, "the way it would happen is that under his plan, if a school was designated as failing, the kids would be trapped there for another three years" (*Presidential...Boston*). Of note is that none of these politicians provide any evidence for their claims that schools in fact need reformation. Outside of a handful of anecdotes involving high schoolers unable to read, the characteristics of a <failing school> are never detailed, nor is a vision of a successful school shared. The need for reform is presented as an obvious matter of fact.

Additionally, both Bush and Gore spoke of the necessity of obtaining <excellence> in education. For Bush, <excellence> justifies the need for <measurement>. For example, in the first presidential debate, he declared, "You need to test every year. That's how you determine if children are progressing to excellence" (*Presidential...Boston*). For Gore, a future state of <excellence>

contrasts with the current state of the <failing school>, as he envisioned in the final presidential debate, “I see a day in the United States of America where all of our public schools are considered excellent, world class. Where there are no failing schools” (*Presidential...St. Louis*, 2000). Though not deployed with the same frequency as other terministic screens, its intensity creates a gesture toward the definition of a successful school: successful schools are <excellent>. Candidates set extremely high expectations for the general public and, consequently, create the condition for inevitable failure. Indeed, Gore’s use of <excellent> juxtaposed with <failing school> creates a binary in which schools are either/or. Bush does not explicitly rely on a binary, but his insistence that all children be excellent is unrealistic, if for no other reason excellence by definition cannot describe every member of a group. Yet who can argue with those visions? Who is willing to say, “I want my child to be average?” The demand of <excellence> plays on the bootstrap myth, in which any American can advance his station through hard work and correct choices while dismissing the actuality that <excellence> cannot be standardized and programmed.

Upon Bush’s election, he did in fact set nearly straight away on his education agenda. The expectations were dizzyingly high. No Child Left Behind sought to ensure 100% proficiency in math and reading by 2014. Though most famous for its standardized testing and punitive measures, No Child Left Behind also included provisions for students in “trap schools,” i.e.—those not meeting a predetermined amount of “adequate yearly progress”: —support for charter schools and the creation of education savings accounts. Successful schools were to receive “praise,” while failing schools were subjected to higher forms of scrutiny that could result in mass firings or school closures. Bush advocated for NCLB on the grounds that “we must liberate their parents to make different choices, different options. In my judgment, in my view of America, there are no second-

rate children in this country, and there are no second rate dreams. One size does not fit all in education” (*Republican...Johnston*).

Yet the law in fact created a one size fits all education through its demands that “all students,” a phrase that appears on nearly every page of the law, reach the same benchmarks on the same tests. The beginning of the law states that its purpose is to “ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” by aligning assessment, accountability, teacher training, curriculum, and instruction with “challenging State academic standards so that students, teachers, parents, and administrators can measure progress against common expectations for student academic achievement.” This is the first deployment of <challenging>, which operates similarly to that of <pass> in the Victorian era. Thus, <challenging> drives each protocol within the law. Not only does <challenging> appear nearly three dozen times in the NCLB law, one section of the law is dedicated to defining <challenging> because it plays a central role in assessing school quality. <Challenging> content standards “specify what children are expected to know and be able to do; contain coherent and rigorous content; and encourage the teaching advanced skills.” In not setting, or even giving examples of, specific standards, the law decontextualizes academics. In result, the terministic screen of <challenging> focuses on the difficulty of a skill, not necessarily the usefulness of a skill.

Immediately, then, the law diverges, at least in part, from Bush’s rhetoric promoting the law. Throughout the debates, he stated he wanted to ensure students could “read, write, add, and subtract.” This skill set is even more limited and narrow than the Victorian 3Rs and implies schools were failing in their basic duties. Of course, one could take “read, write, add, and

subtract” symbolically, a stand-in for common and necessary skills. This is rather hard to do, however, when looking at the law itself, which only requires testing in reading and math.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, the focus on reading and math alone, particularly the skills that could be easily <measured>, could not prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy as desired by the candidates during the debates. Nor does this testing regime, and subsequent consequences, encourage the character education championed by Bush himself, as well as every other Republican candidate. In addition, achievement must be measured in three gradations: basic, proficient, and advanced, with the latter two counting as “high achievement.” In offering no guidance on what these levels mean, the policymakers created a situation in which one could manipulate the definitions of achievement to change the perceptions of achievement without changing the school’s conditions at all. Thus, education reform is revealed as a rhetorical problem on two levels. First, the expectations set in public conversations do not align with the contours of policy, creating the impression of failure. Secondly, the markers of success written within policy are only vaguely defined, allowing administrators to easily manipulate data, further obscuring the means to evaluate a school’s efficacy.

The public school system was thus fated for failure under No Child Left Behind. In its most concrete terms, 100% proficiency is not a realistic goal. Even if every child were capable of learning skills at the exact pace required by the law, students may not meet such benchmarks for reasons outside a school’s control. Secondly, “proficiency” is itself a squishy term and its lack of definability allows policymakers to manipulate perceptions of student achievement, making it difficult to determine what a student knows. Of course, that presumes we can ever neatly

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<sup>18</sup> The law did provide for science to be tested starting in the 2005-2006 school year, although not yearly. Rather, science would be tested once in elementary school, once in middle school, and once in high school.

measure knowledge. On a more philosophical level, the law was not designed to meet the social needs expressed in the debates about education reform. Reading and math alone do not a skilled worker make, particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nor does the law do anything to promote the morality desired by politicians at an individual level or a structural level.<sup>19</sup>

This very Victorian approach of placing faith in policymakers' ability to quantify learning resulted in some very Victorian complaints, most notably a narrowed curriculum and over-testing. As should be anticipated for a policy that only holds schools accountable for two subjects, bipartisan complaints about the narrowing of the curriculum ensued during the 2008 presidential campaign. Most eloquently, Democratic candidate Dennis Kucinich promised to "Eliminate No Child Left Behind, which is aimed at testing instead of improving children's educational opportunity through language, music and the arts" (*Democratic... "All-American"*). Republican Mike Huckabee more bluntly claimed, "one of the reasons we have kids failing is not because they're dumb, it's they're bored. They're bored with a curriculum that doesn't touch them" (*Republican...Miami*). Democrat Bill Richardson picked up on this boredom-as-the-problem theme, declaring multiple times he would "emphasize the arts" in school curricula because that would bolster "science and math proficiency" (*Democratic...Johnston*).

Although Romney continued to support the testing provisions on the grounds they promoted civil rights (*Republican...South Carolina*), the Democratic candidates forcefully denounced them. Clinton accused NCLB of turning children into "a little walking test" (*AFL-CIO*), while Kucinich promised to move away from quantitative measures that "make our children good

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<sup>19</sup> There were provisions in the law for parents to send their children to a school of their choice if their zoned school became labeled a <failing school>. School choice was not, therefore, an option available to every student as many politicians would prefer. Additionally, because so many schools were granted waivers and additional remediation plans before being condemned as <failing>, it is unclear how often the choice option was in fact available.

little test-takers, but qualitative so our children learn real skills, learning skills, language, arts, and help them grow” (*Democratic...Drake*). In fact, much criticism stemmed from the belief that NCLB was not imparting “real” or useful skills. Obama complained that “one of the failures of No Child Left Behind...is that it so narrowly focused on standardized tests that it has pushed out a lot of important learning that needs to take place” (*Democratic...Texas*) and included in his priorities, “Changing No Child Left Behind so that we’re not just teaching to a test and crowding out programs like art and music that are so critical” (*Democratic...Johnston*).

Upon his election, Obama did in fact make changes to federal education policy through Race to the Top legislation. Two justifications for these changes were that NCLB “provides incentives for setting low standards” and “mislabels schools as failing” (“Blueprint for Accountability”). When one considers that by 2015, forty-two states were operating under waivers<sup>20</sup>, that seems likely. Nearly universal failures say more about the instrument than the participants. It also again demonstrates the rhetorical nature of education reform; with the stroke of a pen, a previously failing school could become successful for legal purposes without any changes to the lived experience within the school, by manipulating benchmarks that define success, either locally or nationally. Simple changes in language adjust expectations, and thus perception, without instituting any material changes.

### **Conclusion**

Public schools have been a contested institution since their conception. I cannot presume to suggest a solution, but I do believe that an increased awareness of the mechanisms at work in

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<sup>20</sup> Under section 9401 of NCLB, schools that failed to meet the law’s benchmarks could receive exemptions from consequences provided they could demonstrate that exemption would “increase the quality of instruction for students; and improve the academic achievement of students.”

the discourse around public schooling may provide a starting point for more productive conversations about reform. My research indicates there are three insoluble conditions of public schooling; while the tensions inherent in these conditions may not be reconcilable, acknowledging their existence may lead to more nuanced conversations about education reform, resulting in more effective policies.

The first insoluble condition is the tension between collectivism and individualism in capitalistic societies. Victorian and contemporary American society share a similar set of capitalistic values: hard work, competition, and a faith in the power of the free market. These values undergird conversations about schooling, creating a tension between the collective need to inculcate these values in all citizens while maintaining (at least the illusion of) individualism and autonomy. This tension is particularly detrimental to the middle class; school reforms target those deemed most in need of explicit instruction regarding the cultural arbitrary (to use Bourdieu's words)—those on the margins of society, who also tend to be in lower socioeconomic classes. Policies regarding not only accountability—which in turn shape curricula and pedagogy—but also improved access in the form of vouchers and charter schools are written with the intention of serving lower-class students, often tightening the “middle class squeeze” of parents who are too well-off to take advantage of reform policies and yet cannot afford many of the options available to parents in the upper-class. While the collective/individual tension may be irreconcilable, paying greater attention to the effects of reform policies on all classes clarify the stakes.

Another insoluble component of education reform is policy's inability to meet the social expectations cast upon schools. The rhetoric of education reform positions schools as a site where moral, productive citizens are formed with the aim of reducing the future burden on other institutions, such as the prison system or welfare services. While logical on the surface, these stated

and implied purposes are expansive and often divorced from consideration of the means through which the design of schools might meet these expectations. Policies are by nature narrow and specific due to the need to evaluate outcomes. This narrowing process is often opaque to the public, creating the impression that schools are “failing” society when one might say policies are failing schools. I find both versions of the expression limiting, however, as each approaches the problem as a binary in which success or failure are absolute. Policies are admittedly often ill-conceived or poorly implemented, but even the best policies cannot “fix schools” because of the limited overlap between the wide-ranging desires of the general public and the limited scope of effective policy. A greater recognition of the purpose/policy gap might invite more prudent discussions about the goals of education reform.

The purpose/policy gap raises the third insoluble condition of education reform: the lack of inter-institutional conceptions of schooling. The nature of the rhetoric deployed about education reform sets the relationship between the schools and other social institutions as one of unilateral reinforcement—the school is the site in which children learn the values and behaviors necessary for the perpetuation of the culture. In reality, institutional energy circulates multi-laterally, with every institution interdependent upon the others. Placing more emphasis on the ways in which institutions both support and undermine each other, such as that around the current school-to-prison-pipeline conversation, could result in more effective policy constructions.

Though the realization that conversations about education reform appear stuck in a rhetorical rut is at times disheartening, I take solace in knowing that schools continue to hold an eminent role in the public imagination. Perhaps these conversations cannot change due to the insoluble conditions that are rediscovered and reworked every generation. I argue, however, that



these conversations can become more productive by respecting the insoluble conditions and searching for non-binary ways to think about schooling. When we shift our words, we can shift our worlds.

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