

A DISCOURSE ON EDUCATION

A DISCOURSE ON EDUCATION:

THE

RENAISSANCE CONNECTION

By

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ABSTRACT

This project examines modern pedagogy in Ontario in the critical light of traditions established by Renaissance Humanist thinkers on education. From the Renaissance to the present day, the project highlights aspects and theories of education in the nineteenth century, with special emphasis on Mary Shelley's cautionary tale, *Frankenstein*.

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	
Intellectual Climate and Continental Influences	10
Chapter 3	
Pedagogy in the English Renaissance: A Survey of Three Humanists	19
Chapter 4	
“The readiness is all.” <i>Hamlet</i> , V. ii. 211	54
Endnotes	67
Works Cited	69

A Discourse on Education: The Renaissance Connection

Chapter One

“What is Education For?” asks a headline in a 1999 issue of *Times Literary Supplement*. Oswyn Murray’s review of *Pedagogy and Power: Rhetorics of classical learning* raises a number of issues regarding the polemics surrounding learning and education from Plato, through Isocrates, to the present.¹ Indeed, “What *is* education for?” is a question that educators should ask themselves. It is important that these people be reflective, as they must know and understand not only what they are doing and implementing, but also why. Two other notions that ought to be considered by these educators are the past and the future.

Why should educators consider the past and future? In times and at places where outlooks and commonality of purposes were stronger, or more readily observed, than seems to be the case here and now, the *why* of education was less contested. Since the early modern period in the western world the question “Why education?” has never been uncontested, yet today it is very hotly contested. The powerfully-urged opinions of many “stakeholders” in education seem to threaten to appropriate a public institution to private ends. Therefore, educators must be prepared to enter the heated debate with the cool authority justified by their reflections.

The notion of a teleology in education implies a beginning. The finding of the beginning of modern education is problematic and contentious, but an examination of some of its antecedents will find that its roots lie in Renaissance England.

The purpose of this project is to look at underlying principles and theories of education through the writings of some of the most influential educators in sixteenth-century Europe: Luis Vives (1492-1540) and Desiderius Erasmus (ca.1467-1536), and English theorists and practitioners, Thomas Elyot (ca.1490- 1546), Roger Ascham (1515-1568) , and Richard Mulcaster (ca.1530-1611). An examination of current educational thought and theory in light of some of its forebears will show that many of the concerns and issues are the same, but it will also show that some needed philosophical thought has been sacrificed on the pyre of commerce and expediency.

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Before we come to examine the Renaissance thinkers that are the subject of this paper, it is instructive to glance briefly at four disparate reflections on the state of education in the period between the present and the Renaissance.

American satirist, lexicographer, and self-declared cynic, Ambrose Bierce, defined education this way: “That which discloses to the wise and disguises from the foolish their lack of understanding.”² Although one enjoys the acerbity of Bierce’s witty comment and acknowledges the probability that it is, at least, partly true, one might also wonder whether this was an accurate picture of education at the time. Bierce is selective in the words he chooses to define; this word, education, is obviously one worth thinking about. It looks as if he is reworking a Socratic trope : the wise man is the one who knows he knows nothing. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, “education” is still a term challenging definition, and a topic for discussion, and sometimes, cynicism. The cynic reminds us of what information-based education often elides,

namely the contingency of information as knowledge.

From the ground between present-day education and its early days, three further commentaries, one from fiction, the others from educational history, will suffice as *loci* for raising and examining some of the ongoing issues and debates regarding education. The first commentary is drawn from nineteenth-century fiction, the second from a late twentieth-century curriculum document, and the last from a history of a century-old educational experiment.

Frankenstein (1818 first edition; 1831 third edition) is perhaps the most chilling and instructive account of the results of experimentation arising in a climate of new ideas, offering a commentary on mankind's place in the cosmos. It also invites reflection on the validity of old ideas and new, as well as education and curriculum. Victor Frankenstein's dear friend, Henry Clerval, is the son of a merchant in Geneva. Henry, as a boy, thrives in the world of "moral relations of things....the virtues of heroes."³ Victor, on the other hand, immerses himself in the world of alchemical, occultist writings by Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus, in his untutored search for knowledge and the "philosopher's stone and the elixir of life" (21). At the time of his departure for Ingolstadt to continue his education, he reflects on his situation and on Clerval's. Henry has attempted to persuade his father that he too should go to the university.

Victor says:

His father was a narrow-minded trader, and saw idleness and ruin in the aspirations and ambitions of his son. Henry deeply felt the misfortune of being debarred from a liberal education. He said little; but when he spoke, I read in his kindling eye and in his animated glance a restrained but firm resolve, not to be chained to the

miserable details of commerce. (25)

Henry longs for the world of ideas and education, which he sees here as Victor's future, whereas what stretches before him at this point is training for a career, until he is able later to convince his father otherwise, interestingly, not by an appeal to the benefits of learning, but through that of love. He tells of his father's incredulity at the idea that his son's intellectual thirst and hunger could not be assuaged by "the noble art of book-keeping,"(37) and concludes his explanation to Victor thus: "But his affection for me at length overcame his dislike of learning, and he has permitted me to undertake a voyage of discovery to the land of knowledge" (37).

At Ingolstadt, when by and by, Victor enters university, he approaches his chemistry class with trepidation and contempt for the modern natural philosophy and natural science, having, as he says, "retrod the steps of knowledge along the paths of time, and exchanged the discoveries of recent enquirers for the dreams of forgotten alchemists" (26). His world is wildly shaken by his encounters with the new-- "the present state of science"-- explained by his professor M. Waldman. These modern masters, lectures Waldman, "have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows" (27). Victor feels the impact of these words palpably; these ideas and his further education lead to his destruction by his creation. Certainly, Mary Shelley's novel is not an educational treatise, but it sets up not only philosophical arguments about power and knowledge, and their right use, but also ideas which pervade the realm of education. Clerval's interest in the liberal arts, although this is where his aptness and ability lie, is initially denied him by his father, who holds out instead a career in commerce. Victor's

encounter with modern science, chemistry, and physiology, and Professor Krompe's open disdain for the old musty nonsense that Victor has been studying on his own, highlight the antipathy between adherents to the old ways and innovators and embracers of the new. In the eighteenth-century world that Shelley creates for her novel, the state of education is clearly one that warrants further contemplation.

The professors at Ingolstadt offer power gained through an education in the (then) modern sciences, thus proclaiming the view that education should be driven by utility, not fuelled with a love of the thought of the past for its own sake. They offer "almost unlimited power"; Victor, until they change his direction, seeks the "dreams of forgotten alchemists" (27). Ironically, the dreams of these now obscure thinkers were of unlimited power. Now, at the date the novel is set, they have become the stuff of contemplation. Shelley puts her finger on a crucial and continuous debate about whether these two disparate goals can coexist in an educational curriculum.

A recent intervention in the continuous debate is the Ministry of Education's curriculum. An examination of this document entitled *The Common Curriculum* (1995) reveals much about our current state of education.⁴ The key points made are that education must "meet the needs of a changing society," and that the common curriculum is to be linked to "policies on anti-racism and ethnocultural equity." The tract's purpose, among others, is to outline the policies and "educational philosophy" which are its underpinnings. The use of the term philosophy should presuppose that there are, indeed, some theories, visions, and fundamental concepts which indicate an underlying and all-encompassing idea regarding views of the child and the purpose of education. For the purposes of this province, however, education is primarily training, with the

emphasis on employability. Of the four headings in the Introduction, “Employability Skills” is first.

While few would deny that, as a society, we need young people who are skillful, some might question the absence of the concept of knowledge in the tract. After “Skills for Lifelong Learning” and “Global Perspective”, the fourth section is “Values.” Its opening sentence, “Students must be equipped to respond constructively to social change,” shows the direction and tenor of the document. Specifically, it refers to societal attitudes toward the changes in family structures, “the influence of established institutions, and the roles and lifestyle choices of men and women,” and finally, to “racial and cultural diversity.” The penultimate paragraph in the Introduction contains an important sentence for the reader who strives to grasp the educational philosophy on which this writing is based: “It is important, therefore, that schools and their programs provide both clear guidelines and a climate of flexibility and understanding in which independent thinking can thrive and in which students can develop values that they themselves consider relevant for the life they envisage.” The writers here make a number of questionable assumptions, when one recalls that this document is for Grades One to Nine: that children are equipped to judge which values are appropriate, that they are cognizant of a “lifestyle”, and that they have already envisaged a life (or even lifestyle) for their future. What is difficult to discern is how the child is to come to these sophisticated, if practicable conclusions, yet that is the concern of education as propounded in this document. The philosophy of education is not actually addressed here; what seems to be more important is its teleology. That is to say, there is little effort to distinguish the possibilities of education from wish-fulfilling social engineering.

The document outlines in seven pages its principles of education. For the purposes of this project, the most important section of the opening portion is on learning. The focus is on values, both how they are shaped, and how they shape society:

The values that are at the heart of the curriculum described ... reinforce democratic rights and responsibilities and are common to many faiths and cultures.... They should help all students to develop a positive sense of self and respect and concern for others, as well as a sense of belonging in the community, a sense of social responsibility, a commitment to democracy and human rights, and a love of learning (17).

In short, the goals are social ends, in hope of producing good citizens. One may wonder how different these aims are from those systems which have gone before. These present writers tell us that many of the practices they outline “are not new and have been at the basis [sic] of our educational practises for some time”(17). This assertion raises a number of questions. Among them are these: Which practices? For how long have they been in existence? Where did they originate? What are their antecedents? *The Common Curriculum* sets itself up as a model for modern education, but as it has not sprung Athena-like from Zeus’s forehead, fully grown and clad, it is useful to examine its lineage. Because the modern curriculum document acknowledges no antecedents, it actually invites an investigation into its forebears in the field. The primary ancestors to be examined in this paper are the influential writers on education, and actual teachers of the early modern period, the English Renaissance.

But many years have elapsed between our current period and the early modern period. Surely, much has changed: the purpose, the focus, the issues, the concerns. Yet, one sees that many things remain the same.

One concept that has not disappeared in the intervening years is change. Certainly, education has been a field for experimentation, rejection of the old, and embracing of the new and revolutionary. English humanism was, in part, a reaction to scholasticism and its high valuation of dialectic and logic. In matters educational, mediaeval teaching practices were decried: there were attacks on the large classes, the fact that only the master had a textbook, that all learning was to be dictated and learned by heart. One example from the time between the Renaissance and the present will suffice as a lesson in the wholesale rejection of past practices and the past in an effort to anticipate the future and mould a new society.

A review of a book about a century-old school in Hampstead, England and its programme makes a number of interesting remarks, and highlights some of the issues which have been concerns in education for centuries. Melanie Phillips, reviewing *King Alfred School and the Progressive Movement 1898-1998*, describes the school as “an experiment in Fabian utopianism.” She continues:

It was always a social revolutionary project, based on using children’s presumed innate goodness to confront and oppose the evils of adult society.... The concept of education, common to all societies that want to replicate themselves, as a cultural initiation, was thus condemned as a kind of child abuse.⁵

Raised here are some questions to be examined later: the nature of the child and children in general, and importance of the “social project”. The underlying philosophy on the place and nature of the child is seen in the sort of school which emphasizes liberality, students’ own choices, freedom leading to license, and an open curriculum. But the reviewer points out, “The paradox of ‘child-centred’ education was that it was anything but that; it was instead a synonym for child

neglect.”

The well-being of the child, then, is a crucial matter in any education system, and is of especial significance when progressive innovation is proposed. The reviewer makes another remark which is germane to the discussion of education in general as she writes about the King Alfred School:

On children from educationally impoverished backgrounds... the impact of progressive education has been catastrophic--a calamity visited on them by the solipsistic intelligentsia, whose ignorance of deprivation is matched only by their arrogant assumption that they know what is best for the lower orders.

One must consider, then, the wisdom of the devisers of educational programmes, the choices made by them, and the impact of these on the child. Ms. Phillips relates an instance in the school's history which emphasizes further topics for discussion. Some parental concerns regarding achievement standards and marks emerged in a

school council motion in 1923, which was narrowly defeated [which] said excessive freedom was producing ‘serious consequences to the health, manners and education of the children’, including ‘unwholesome license... general, personal slackness...[and] carelessness for the feelings and wishes of others.’

These matters concerning the good of the child--his mind, learning, manners, and physical health--are, with the other points raised through the article about a school a hundred years old, the main points for discussion about pedagogy and practice in early modern England.

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Chapter Two

Intellectual Climate and Continental Influences

Although the focus for this project is sixteenth-century English theorists and practitioners of education, it must be acknowledged that the main flow of ideas is from Continental Europe to England. Certainly, there is some English influence on Continental thought--notably that of Sir Thomas More-- that entitles us to think of it as a dialogue. It is germane to this discussion to examine two continental writers whose theories on education were greatly influential. As stated in the Introduction, this project concerns itself with lineage; one can consider education as a continuum. To that end, an examination of the educational philosophy of Erasmus and Vives, as well as their ideas about methods of instruction, will lay the groundwork for the later English writers. Writing in the earlier part of the sixteenth century (Erasmus's works used here are from 1510, 1511, and 1529, the writing by Vives, 1531), their influence is felt in England particularly by Roger Ascham and Richard Mulcaster.

An amusing, and instructive, place to begin is with Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* (1510), in order to highlight by means of satire the plight of education in his time. Folly introduces herself to the solemn, glum listeners in the crowded hall, telling them that is her "pleasure to act the sophist...not the sort whose daily bread is cramming the minds of schoolboys with painful trivialities or who teach the tricks of quibbling with more than female stubbornness."⁶ Three issues are raised here in her introduction. The first is how children should learn. Folly says that

rather than learning they are being stuffed, as if they were sausages. The second is the paucity of reasonable material for them to learn. Instead, they are being fed disjointed, useless arcana in the guise of learning. The third is the quality of the master. In this case, he is merely earning a living, and doing an appalling job of teaching or training children. After censuring with ridicule a number of vices, Folly makes a brief tour of education. She derides the curriculum: “What they teach their students is utter gibberish” (52). She scourges the masters: “And though I don’t know by what flim-flam they do it, they are able to persuade the mothers and fathers of their pupils that they themselves are just as great as they make out” (52). But Folly’s (and Erasmus’s) not inconsiderable scorn is heaped on particular recipients: “the teachers of grammar are the most wretched of men, the most miserable, the most forsaken of God” (51). Regarding the conditions for any supposed learning, Folly refers to classrooms as “beating-mills” where there are “herds of boys...deaf with the constant racket, and sick because of the constant stench and squalor” (51). As if these conditions are not bad enough, the children, if they live through this chaos, or circle of hell, have to endure a reign of terror, including canings, floggings, and the strap, as well as looks and words of thunder and abuse. That all these areas-- curriculum, classroom environment and conditions for learning, teacher competence, accountability to parents, and methodology--are in need of reform seems quite clear from Erasmus’s funny, but bitter lampoon.

Although Erasmus’s metier is clearly satire, he is also capable of treating his subject with *gravitas*. He and his contemporary Vives are serious commentators. The three salient treatises for close examination are Erasmus’s *De Ratione Studii, That is Upon the Right Method of Instruction* (1511), and *De Pueris statim...* (1529), and Vives’s *The Transmission of Knowledge*

(1531). As the opening paragraph of this section stated, the emphasis here is not specific curricula but their educational philosophy and ideas about appropriate methods of instruction.

The obvious place to begin is examining the purpose and intention of education. Erasmus in *The Treatise, De Pueris Statim*, makes clear a position which is echoed by later writers. God has given other creatures powers or instincts, but He has given man reason: “In granting to man alone the privilege of reason [He] has thrown the burden of development of the human being upon training.”⁷ Therefore the first, second, and third means to happiness must be the “right training or education”(183). In other words, education is for one’s life. His intention is, through their proper training, to “carry forward youths of merely average intelligence to a creditable standard of scholarship” (178). Vives, in describing his ideal school, makes it clear that it should be made known when the child enters school “that the end of learning is that the boy may become wise and therefore better”, not that it will make him an easy living.⁸ In his Appendix, *The Aim of Studies*, he reflects further that the purpose of studies is to see connections, to reflect, to go on learning, and to have knowledge (272). This sounds, to the North American ear, very familiar: it is, in effect, life-long learning for life-long learners. But Vives goes further: “People say: First get rich; then become philosophical” (277). He points out that if one becomes a philosopher first, it is easy to be as rich as it is necessary to be. But his most important ideas are near the end of the Appendix. The fruit of all studies and knowledge is this: we must turn it “to usefulness, and employ it for the common good”(283). He reiterates this idea: study “must be attuned to practical usefulness in life”; the learned man should be an example (284). As he tells the reader that this man should pass on his learning to others, he uses as his example Christ as teacher.

The trope of the imitation of Christ is, of course, a humanist commonplace. Inevitably, such religious concepts play an important part in life and education in the sixteenth century. Yet, the humanists also stress the nature of man and the child. Vives emphasizes this. He writes that the child is to see that by nature he is weak and ready for evil, but that he will become accustomed to good, and then “the habit of doing right becomes natural”(84). One sees this notion of virtue through habituation in Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*: “Thus the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature, but we are by nature able to acquire them, and reach our complete perfection through habit.”⁹ Although, like Vives, a Catholic, Erasmus has a somewhat different view of mankind. Even though of course acquainted with Aristotle, Erasmus holds a more optimistic expectation: “And I affirm [that] the natural bent of man is to philosophy and right conduct”(190). In a letter in 1531, a dedication of an edition of Terence’s comedies, he writes to the young men, “But there is nothing more natural than virtue and learning.”¹⁰ Here, in passing, it is fascinating to note that the two Renaissance humanists anticipate, in their contrasting perspectives on children, the conundrum of the nineteenth-century King Alfred School experiment. Are children naturally good and to be used to redeem corrupted society, or are they naturally tending toward evil, and should themselves be redeemed by the customary practices of education? Is learning, then, a “virtue”, or a device for social engineering? These are issues which recur in our later writers. Additional ideas about the nature of children emerge when one considers an element of training which is crucial to both writers, namely early education.

Erasmus makes a point at the beginning of *De Ratione Studii*: early learning is important because it is difficult to undo wrongs.¹¹ Most of this treatise is devoted to methodology

associated with the right teaching of language, which is not the prime concern in this section of this paper. His stronger points are seen in the later work of 1529, *The Treatise* as revealed in the subtitle: *That Children Should Straightaway from their earliest years be trained in virtue and sound learning*. The child's mind is flexible and tenacious; by nature we want to know, and we seek for knowledge; we learn more readily in our young years (180). His first law, so to speak, is that one should begin early: "We must not underestimate the capacity of youth to respond to suitable demands upon the intelligence" (217). He condemns the fashion of allowing childhood to pass without "fruit of instruction, and of deferring its first steps until the allurements of indulgence have made application more difficult" (182). Another crucial idea is what in 2000 most would call "aptitude" or "ability" and "readiness". In recognizing that children have different abilities and proclivities, he sees too that it is important for these things to be observed by the master or tutor. In quoting Seneca-- "No age is too late for learning"-- he adds that he is convinced that no age is too early (198). But he is careful to point out that the things to be learned are to be appropriate to the child's capabilities and ken (197-198). It is interesting to note in passing that this concept of readiness is something that some educators seem to have overlooked in devising curricula which place some abstract concepts at levels which may not be reasonable given the mental development of the child. I shall return to this concern in the conclusion of this project.

Vives's focus is very much these notions of readiness, aptitude, critical thinking, and learning styles. Like Erasmus, he can see that there are considerable differences in the abilities of children, in their natural mental powers, in their sharpness in observing, their capacity for

comprehending, and their power in comparing and judging (73-76). His perspicacity about acumen (sharpness of mind) -- what we could call also mental acuity (from the Latin *acer*) -- as well as subtlety and swiftness place him very much in the direct line to our modern education. His references to types of learners -- “clever in things done by the hands”(79)-- also anticipates learning styles explored in the 1960s to 1980s (oral, visual, tactile or kinesthetic) including the frequently-invoked binary division of “concrete and abstract thinkers.” Vives does take the logical step with this knowledge: instruction should be matched to ability and disposition. To this end, the boy should have a period of one to three months in the preparatory part of the school while his disposition is investigated in order to fit the child with what he is suited to (83). In recognizing too that parents sometimes have difficulty seeing that their children are not suited to what they, the parents, would like for them, and are often blind to their abilities, it is up to the teacher to help the child find his place, “if not in learning, at least in his course of life” (84).

Another important aspect of the pedagogy of both writers is what could, in the year 2001, be called “the whole child.” For both, the child’s education is not only the training of the mind, but also the body and spirit; it is also a collaboration between home and school. Erasmus points out that it behooves parents (actually the father) to provide an education for the good of the child and for his future.¹² He avers that it is irresponsible to leave a child’s future to chance, when the father ensures that other things in his realm -- lands, castles, servants, *et cetera* -- are carefully husbanded (185). In this same vein, he points out the outrageous example of the neglectful father who will be more careful choosing a farm overseer or cook, or the parsimonious one who spends money on himself, wines, and his mistress rather than on choosing the right educator for his child.

A good and early start to his education is temperate, moderate, moral upbringing at home, as “parents themselves are to blame in taking little heed for that which the child imbibes in his early years” (193). Erasmus anticipates Mulcaster here too as he certainly does not wish to preclude the parent from his child’s training once he begins school. The parents are encouraged to visit the schoolroom and note progress (195).

Vives, likewise, invites the participation of parents, encouraging relatives and friends to give their views about the child’s progress and assess his suitability to the learning. Vives also sets out some specific propositions for the well-being of the child. He describes the site for the school: it should be healthy, but not verdant or too pleasant, in order to reduce the temptation to wander or to stray from the tasks at hand. It should also be away from the crowds and inns, and from court and females, for the other obvious temptations offered there. The food, he says should be pure, plentiful, conducive to a healthy body and a vigorous mind. An amusing recommendation he makes is that for “very fine minds, somewhat fatty foods are beneficial for health, as well as for keeping their force of intellect, that they may not suddenly collapse” (123). Like Mulcaster, he also recommends the need for exercise and recreation. Appropriate activities are those which combine “honour with pleasure”, such as throwing the javelin, playing ball, and running (121), recalling Cicero’s “*mens sana in corpore sano.*”

The qualities of the master and his methods are also dealt with by both writers, not surprisingly. These aspects are, of course, crucial to the learning environment of the children. As Erasmus’s *In Praise of Folly*, discussed above, shows, there were a number of deficiencies in both

these requirements in some establishments. The teacher, says Erasmus, needs a gentle, sympathetic manner and “a knowledge of wise and attractive methods.”¹³ It is not enough that he be learned; he should also have sound practices. In his teaching, he should progress by play initially, and by degrees, and not expect children to be “diminutive adults” (211). Regarding discipline, a contentious issue both at the time and now, he says, “Fear is of no real avail in education” (203). Respect compels obedience, he feels. On the subject of flogging, he sides with Quintilian against it under any circumstances (209). Those masters who know their own incompetence are the worst floggers: “They cannot teach, so they beat” (206). “Teaching by beating ...is not a liberal education” he says, neither is the use of strong language of blame (208). Encouragement, setting up models for emulation, praising those who have achieved, and warning those who are sinking are the things worthy of a Christian, he continues, but if none of these avail, “let the rod be used with due regard to self-respect in the manner of it” (209). He concludes with these thoughts: there is no need for education to be difficult; it is so only through poor methods and poor teachers for “there is not virtue in difficulty, as such, in instruction” (221).

Vives, like Erasmus, also uses Quintilian as a reliable guide in these matters. The master should be learned, skilled in an intellectual discipline, and a skillful teacher, as well as morally upright (53). He should also be fitted to the job and the kind of pupils: “the better his methods, the better they will understand” (56). Like Erasmus, and later Ascham and Mulcaster, he feels that students should be attracted by a “certain majesty and authority”: “let the teacher accomplish more among his pupils by inspiring trust and veneration than by blows and threats” (63). Love is to encourage the students, but if this is not enough, he says, then one may resort to “reverence

and fear” (71). He feels that “the rod of discipline will be constantly raised before the eyes of the boy and around his back,” alluding to Solomon and the proverb regarding the rod’s salutary nature (71). “Pain may recall boys to the right, when reason is not strong enough” (119). Like Erasmus, then, he has the high ideals of love and reason in mind, but he is also a pragmatist. The delicate issue of remuneration is also raised by him. Vives is concerned that the master not be grasping for money, but he should receive a “salary from the state, such as a good man will desire but a wicked man disdain” (57).

In *A Man for All Seasons*, Sir Thomas More, in conversation with Richard Rich says, “The Dean of St. Paul’s offers you a post: with a house, a servant and fifty pounds a year.” When Rich discovers the nature of the post, he responds with bitter disappointment: “A teacher!” To which More replies: “A man should go where he won’t be tempted.”¹⁴

These two writers, Erasmus and Vives, concerned about the state of education and the future of their young men and their countries outline the most advanced pedagogical ideas in the period. The very term “pedagogue” has undergone changes in its usage and reception. Although it was used as a synonym for teacher or schoolmaster, it also became a term of scorn and derision for the inept practitioners of the period, the pedants and the “rabid grammarians” (Vives 56), as we shall see at the end of the next section. The writings of the three main English pedagogues of the period, Thomas Elyot, Roger Ascham, and Richard Mulcaster, will be examined with the purpose of extending the examination of the lineage of the current system.

Chapter Three

Pedagogy in the English Renaissance: A Survey of Three Humanists

In Act I of *A Man For All Seasons*, Sir Thomas More has just returned from his meeting with Cardinal Wolsey and has discovered that Master William Roper has been visiting More's daughter Margaret. Roper, More tells her, is not an acceptable or prospective suitor as long as he is a heretic. When Alice, his wife, hears the news, she says: "Oh--why don't you beat that girl!" More responds: "No no, she's full of education-- and it's a delicate commodity." "Mm! And more's the pity!" she replies. But, More finishes the discussion thus: "Yes, but it's there now and think what it cost" (18-19). The reader may have noticed that there have been no references in this paper to women's education. Is this not odd considering that the most powerful person in the country during the second half of the sixteenth century was a woman, one of the best educated people of the day? The subject of women and their education is a broad enough topic to warrant and occupy a complete study of its own. Certainly Lady Jane Grey, Alice More, Margaret More, and Margaret Elyot, as well, of course, as Elizabeth herself, whom Mulcaster calls "our diamond at home"¹⁵ -- in praise of her education -- are worthy subjects of more than a glimpse at the ideas about women, their reading, and their education. These areas, however, were subject to considerable discussion at the time, and can not be dealt with in this small study. Differences between men and women, both "natural" and social, were thought to be so significant that the education of each sex had to be considered on its own terms. My focus, then, remains the recommendations of the period for training young men, particularly as they pertain to teaching,

philosophy, rationale or purpose, curriculum, methodology, and innovations.

I am separating the discussion of Thomas Elyot from that of Roger Ascham and Richard Mulcaster on the grounds that Elyot's intention is markedly different in direction from those of Ascham and Mulcaster. Elyot's *The Boke named the Governour* is concerned with gentlemen of the governing class. In this respect Elyot's work might reasonably be thought of as a sub-genre of the education of princes. Ascham and Mulcaster are more concerned with people of middle-rank. The tradition of advice on the education of princes is an ancient one-- from at least Aristotle on-- as Elyot is well aware. It is not the purpose of this paper to examine this tradition, but to look at the prescription for education that Elyot advances in the first book of his treatise.

Elyot sets out the purpose of his book clearly in the "Proheme."¹⁶ His interest is in the "publike weale" (5) and the education of those worthy to be governors of Henry VIII's kingdom. Like many writers on education before and after, he is concerned about the current situation and times. He refers to the "malignite of this present tyme, all disposed to malicious detraction"(6). Not only does he mention the times, but he also emphasizes the place. The particular "Englishness" of this treatise pervades the whole piece. Elyot makes a point of reminding the king that he is writing in the vernacular; this is an important idea. It is a learned document, showing erudition in the classics, written in English: "I have now enterprised to describe [this education] in our vulgare tunge..." he explains (5). Elyot's pointed use of English underlines the rise in the use of the vernacular for learned treatises, even though many such authors affect to prefer the learned language, Latin.

Elyot takes pains in defining his terms. Public weal is a concept at the heart of proper governance, in which a king or prince rules for the good of his people (15). On the subject of just governance, Elyot draws his metaphor from bees in the following analogy. The principal bee has no sting, but much knowledge. He directs the others to go out when the weather is good, for the betterment of the hive (21). So too should a just kingdom function. The sovereign needs to direct magistrates who are well-chosen by him. Here Elyot uses another analogy-- the wise gardener (29). The preparation of these magistrates is crucial: one must find fertile ground, plant carefully so that the seed will be nourished, eliminate proximate weeds, and ensure that water is close at hand. Elyot's metaphor is a widely-used commonplace, as, for example, in Shakespeare's *Richard II* where King Richard's commonwealth has become a garden overgrown with rank weeds, and plagued by caterpillars -- evil counsellors. Elyot's purpose is to show "the beste fourme of education or bringing up of noble children,...in suche maner as they may be...able to be governours of a publike weal" (26).

Like Erasmus and Vives, Elyot recognizes the importance of the early years of childhood in the continuum of learning. A child's first nurses are to be good, clean, virtuous, discreet, and grave (29-30). Another interesting suggestion he makes is that men are to be kept out of the nursery in order to preserve children against wantonness, and unclean acts or words (30). Since he knows that children are imitative, he also knows that they can easily develop bad habits from "leude parentes"(30). It behooves the parents to "instill in them swete maners and vertuouse custome"(31). Parental duty is also to provide suitable companions and playfellows who do not act untowardly, persuade them away from virtue with flattery, or make them proud (31). Elyot

uses a classical example to underscore the importance of learning and education. Philip of Macedonia wrote to Aristotle asking him to become tutor to his son, Alexander. Elyot's example contains an idea which resonates throughout the Renaissance: "The same Alexander was wont to say openly, that he ought to gyve as great thankes to Aristotle his mayster, as to ...his father, for of hyme he toke the occasion to lyve, of the other he received the reason and way to lyve well" (41). Elyot can not overestimate the importance of learning. He feels the need to come to its defence because some people reproach learning and equate it with the position of being a "clerke" (55). But, he says, to reject our intellect and reason, which distinguish us from the rest of God's creatures, is an absurd idea (57). An amusing anecdote from his classical repertoire reinforces this idea. Diogenes, that dour cynic, seeing an unlearned man lying on a stone, says to his companions: "Beholde where one stone sytteth on an other" (57). A life without learning is a life unlived.

Elyot is also interested in the nature of the child, his inclinations, and the best ways of teaching him. The tutor ought to know the nature of the child, and should commend his virtues and scold when necessary, even, in extreme circumstances, with "vehement wordes" (34). Although children need to begin learning in their early years, it is important to find the best methods of helping them learn. The child is not to be "inforced...by violence to lerne, but accordynge to the counsaile of Quintilian, to be swetely allured therto, with praises and such praty gyftes as children delite in" (31). But for the child who is not disposed to learn, says Elyot, one must tempt him with some reading material which is close to his inclination or imagination, as a "plesant sauce, [to] provoke hym to have good appetie to studie" (41). One sees this technique

in current teaching, with the proliferation in the 1980s of “high-interest” novels for reluctant readers. Although their approaches are quite different, Elyot, like nineteenth-century Froebel,¹⁷ recognizes that learning through play is also valid and profitable. Certainly, Elyot’s schooling is a far cry from Froebel’s Kindergarten, but he suggests that children can learn their letters by painting or “lymning” “in a pleasaunt maner” (31). An understanding of the nature of children is fundamental to the success of educational theory and practice.

Another important consideration is one seen previously in Vives, namely readiness and appropriateness. An examination of his views on reading demonstrates his sensitivity to these ideas. He warns that one is not to spend too long on the grammar text because a “gentle wytte” tires easily (43). Grammar is “but an introduction to the understanding of autors,” and is not meant to mortify a child’s “corage” (43). Since the greatest pleasure is in reading, it is sensible to learn a few rules quickly, then have Aesop’s fables read aloud in Greek. The virtue of this method is that it “is a moche pleasant lesson, and also profitable” because it is “elegant and brefe,” and includes “mocher morall and politike wisdomer” (43). Elyot’s next recommendation for reading is “some quicke and mery dialoges, elect out of Luciane” or comedies by Aristophanes, these latter because they are in verse, and, therefore, more easily memorized (43-44). His choices indicate his intention to engage the imagination and interest of his student. He suggests also Homer, who embodies all eloquence and learning, remarking that Aristotle had Alexander read Homer first. In addition, he recommends Virgil’s *Aeneid*, *Bucolics*, and *Georgics*: these all have things to delight a child (44-45). The main point here is not about a specific curriculum, but about the principles underlying the choices. These all appeal to the child’s imagination and morality, and suit his level

of maturity.

In keeping with the idea of a child's thinking skills and maturity, Elyot also makes recommendations regarding higher level skills. By the age of thirteen, the master will read him "somewhat of that parte of logike that is called *Topica*" either from Cicero or from Agricola (48). This is, in Elyot's view, a logical place to begin for a pupil of this age. Next, he says, rhetoric is the appropriate subject, using Hermogines, Cicero, or Quintilian. Erasmus's "litle boke," *De Copia*, is also suggested since it has enough information for those who may require a modicum of oratorical skills (48). But Elyot is very forceful about the inappropriateness of having thirteen or fifteen year old children set to study law. He lambastes the language of law: it is "barbarouse...nat onely voyde of all eloquence, but also...it serveth to no commodoitie or necessary purpose, no man understandyng it but they whiche have studyed the lawes"(66). Not only is this language opaque, but there is no pleasure for a thirteen to fifteen year-old in this difficult learning. The only allure to studying will be "lucre," he conjectures, but predicts that this inappropriately early study and vocation will end in the abandoning of study, and the taking up of gaming (66). Again, in this analysis, it is the principle of choices and decisions regarding curriculum, rather than the prescription of texts and authors that is central to the discussion.

Aside from his recommendations on appropriate authors and materials, Elyot has much to say about other aspects of a child's education. As we have seen in Vives, the concept of "the whole child" is one crucial for the success of an educational endeavour. Elyot recognizes the need for balance.

A child is not to have continual study; academic learning should be mixed with pleasant activity and exercise (35). In recommending the playing of instruments he refers to King David, Achilles, and Alexander, but adds that a child should not engage so much that it detracts from study. Music can be used to solace the self, or even better, musical training enables one to better appreciate the playing of others. Similarly, art--specifically painting and carving-- has a place in the educational system that Elyot describes. Given the mandate of his treatise, it is not surprising that the study of art is not stressed as a means of self-expression, but as a way to understand what one reads about art works, and as a way to appreciate "the grace of the thyng"(39). These wise governors should be learned and cultured. It is interesting to note in passing that the study of art and music are too often in our times considered frivolous and unworthy of consideration in a school curriculum. Experience shows that in Southern Ontario it is usually the concerned parents who must lobby to retain music programmes against the preference of successive governments for training in business and entrepreneurial skills. The arts are often seen as expendable and as "frills."

If certain current educators frown on art and music, they would surely be surprised by Elyot's startling disquisition on dancing to which he devotes many pages of his book. Cognizant of Augustine's strictures against it, he endeavours to explain why it might have previously been considered lascivious or idolatrous (85). He then uses his knowledge of the ancients, including King David to show that it is a useful form of exercise in which young men can express strength and governance of motion, and young women "moderation and shamefastnes" (92). Elyot, very much in the spirit of humanism, is harmonizing the seeming prohibition of dancing by Augustine

with the injunction given to David in the Old Testament to dance before the Lord.¹⁸ He convincingly shows that dancing can be an introduction to virtue, principally prudence: that is, the knowledge of what ought to be desired and followed as well as what is to be fled from or eschewed (94). This virtue is obviously one greatly desirable in the character of those of the governing class. Far from being a frivolous activity, dance here is a harmonious ritual melding of things earthly and heavenly. Elyot points out that the first stage in every dance is “called honour,” which is a bow or curtsy, followed by a pause: “by that may be signified, that at the begynnyng of all our actes, we shulde do due honour to God, whiche is the roote of prudence” (95). He calls on those men who aim toward honour and nobility to prepare to dance, or at least to watch carefully. He makes a very strong recommendation for the inclusion of dance; it is both a noble and virtuous pastime.

Elyot’s vision of education, like that of Erasmus and Vives, also encompasses the idea of the entire child-- mind, soul, and body. Diet is important: the child is not to gorge on meat or drink (54). In mentioning sleep, Elyot writes that eight hours is sufficient. This amount, incidentally, is what our modern day experts tell us is what we need, Mrs. Thatcher’s boasting notwithstanding. He stresses that overeating and oversleeping are not conducive to learning (54). Certain activities and practices are helpful, others harmful. Playing at dice, for example, is not good for the mind or the body. It is full of “malice and robrye” (105). Elyot shows that it is, in fact, entirely against virtue: it involves coveting another’s goods, avarice, and swearing, and also leads to gluttony (105). Of the activities in which there is no exercise, chess is the best because it is good for wit and memory: “it is the more commendable and commodius, if the players have

radde the moralization of the chese” (107). But Elyot also addresses those exercises which both preserve health and increase strength. These include shooting of the long bow, running, wrestling, swimming, and tennis, but exclude “boulynge, claishe, pynnes, and koytyng” as these as are unsuitable for “al noble men” (109). Like Erasmus and Vives, he sees the need for exercise. It is good for the spirit, for digestion, and it prolongs life (74). Again, one may note in passing that our present system has strayed far from these ideas, relegating only a little time to the idea of the whole child in a society in which sedentary pastimes have frequently supplanted the active ones. In Southern Ontario, after Grade 9, Physical Education is an optional subject.

According to Elyot, a proper education is essential for the good of society-- the public weal-- and crucial to this is the good tutor. When the child is seven years old, he is to be taken from the company of women and assigned a tutor who is old, “worshipful,” gentle, grave, and preferably, learned (44). It will be helpful for the tutor to have knowledge of maps and cosmography too since his pupil will be able to derive pleasure in knowing about the world without having to leave his safe home.

Elyot is consonant with both Erasmus and Vives, in the opinion that parental duty lies in the selection of a suitable tutor. Negligent parents are often more concerned about “howe small a salary he will be contented, and never do inserche howe moche good lernynge he hath, and howe amonge well lerned men he is therin estemed” (58). In fact, some gentlemen take more effort in inquiring about the skill of prospective cooks and falconers than in the master who is to be entrusted with the important task of educating his child (58). This is a problem because, as Elyot

writes, “in this realme [there are] fewe perfecte schole maisters” (71). There is a paucity of good grammarians which severely limits a child’s education (72). By the term “grammarian” Elyot does not refer to those who “onely can teache or make rules” (72). A good teacher, however, will be a good speaker, be well-read, and be knowledgeable about figures of speech, sentence structure, and histories (72). The results of a poor teacher’s incompetence will need to be undone by subsequent teachers, but what is more important is that the early years of potential learning and the crucial “sharpnesse of witte” will have been wasted (73). Elyot realizes that for the good of the realm and its future a proper education observing the aforementioned tenets of pedagogy is absolutely crucial.

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That the proper education of young people is ultimately good for the commonwealth is accepted as undeniably true in the educational treatises by Roger Ascham and Richard Mulcaster. But their probable audience and readership and the teleology of their educational prescriptions differ somewhat from Elyot’s vision. Their views are outlined in Ascham’s *The Schoolmaster* (1570) and Mulcaster’s *Positions* (1581) and *Elementary* (1582).

For both, learning is of paramount importance. Ascham is against the notion that experience of the world is the best teacher, a notion that our current system in Ontario has taken as a canonical truth. A good example of this is the requirement of the 40 hours of community service necessary for graduation. Ascham says: “Learning teacheth more in one year than experience in twenty, and learning teacheth safely, when experience maketh more miserable than wiser.”¹⁹ Although elsewhere in his writing he takes Erasmus to task, he acknowledges his insight

and good judgment: “Erasmus, the honor of learning of all our time, said wisely that experience is the common schoolhouse of fools and ill men; men of wit and honesty be otherwise instructed” (51). The purpose of a good education is so that young gentlemen and the nobility will be “grounded in judgment of learning, so founded in love of honesty” that they will be able to serve their prince and country well with “wisdom, learning, and virtue” (52).

Mulcaster, in *Positions*, emphasizes that the good of the nation depends on learning, both for rich and poor, and that much depends on the middle ground (138-140) which Mulcaster defines as those who do not have too much wealth nor too much poverty to wrestle with. He shows too that it is sensible for parents to have their children learned: learning can help a person even in unfortunate circumstances (141). It is incumbent on the parent to provide an education for his child, since the parent is more bound to his country than his child; it will maintain the child after he is without a father (142). Mulcaster’s somewhat opaque argument here hangs upon the question of the competing loyalties to family and to nation. It is natural that parents favour their own offspring, but “euerie parent must beare in memorie that he is more bound to his countrey, then to his child”(142). Mulcaster, then, is strongly in favour of education as a public good against the claim of education as a private benefit.

In the Epistle to Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, in the *Elementary*, Mulcaster writes that the country feels the fruits of learning and “thrives by the effect” (ij). He appeals to Dudley to take this treatise with a “verie goodwill, as [his] dailie travell is to work [his] cuntries good”(ij). In the treatise proper, he takes the idea further. Public use is the natural use of all

learning; these educated men will be the magistrates in the realm. They must have fitness of body and mind in order to be suitable for public service (12-14). These are very appropriate themes for Mulcaster to address to Dudley whom he characterizes as a great patron of learning, and with a less disinterested purpose, as a patron known for seeing that learned men are “worthilie placed” (ijj). The major idea about the goal of education is one examined in the earlier Renaissance writers: “The end of education, and train[sic] is to help natur vnto hir perfection” (28). The proof, he says, of a good “Elementarie” is to “resemble natur in multitude of abilities” (27). Since it is in our nature as humans to resemble God’s pattern and intention, it is also true that we should want to be good and to serve well, whatever we do for the benefit of our country (27). But in his Peroration in *Elementary*, Mulcaster, although not negating his earlier comments, qualifies them. Although duty to one’s country is a given, other considerations can emerge when this duty is done: “Everie privat man traveleth in this world to win rest after toil, to have ease after labor” (235). This recognition of the public and the private end “which doth pitch in quietnesse after stir” (246) can be sustained by learning. The peace and stability of the realm is the deferred pleasure and sustenance provided by a good education and life-long learning. In this way Mulcaster resolves the ancient debate over the claims of the public and private life, which in schoolrooms was often presented as a debate between the active and the contemplative life.

Both men explain the purpose of their own works. Ascham’s explanation of the genesis of his is very interesting. In his preface, he relates an anecdote regarding the discussion around a dining table with members of the Privy Council, including Lord Cecil. The subject of beatings in schools provoked a lively argument. As he explains, all participated except for Sir Richard

Sackville, who spoke to him alone afterwards. Sackville's personal experience of fleeing from learning because of the fear of beating caused him to encourage Ascham to write down his thoughts on how best to teach, for "good bringing up of children and young men" (5-7). Ascham completes his explanation of his book in a topos of inadequacy. He, former tutor to Princess, now Queen, Elizabeth modestly writes that his book is not a great work. Rather than a grand edifice, it is a "small cottage, poor for the stuff and rude for the workmanship." He leaves it to his children as a last will and testament (9-11).

Mulcaster's *Positions* shows that his purpose is the unifying and standardizing of pedagogy. What is striking here is his championing of the vernacular as an excellent way to help his country and to widen his audience: "I will serve my countrie that waie, which I do surely thinke will proue most intelligible vnto her" (3). He wishes to make the matters of learning accessible, so that they are not "mysteries to the multitude" (3). His point about why his work is written in English rather than Latin is well taken in our times. A language available to all who can read is preferable to the often opaque language used in recent and current educational documents. Mulcaster's clearly stated intentions could stand as object lessons for some of the current writers of Mission Statements.

On the nature of children and early learning, both men have commentaries. Ascham's view is that the nature of man is ready to receive goodness "in [the] innocency of young years before that experience of evil have taken root in him"(34). His optimism echoes that of Erasmus, discussed earlier in this project. Ascham writes: "For the pure clean wit of a sweet young babe is,

like the newest wax, most able to receive the best and fairest printing”(34). He, like many others, draws an additional metaphor from the garden: “Young grafts grow not only soonest but also fairest, and bring always forth the best and sweetest fruit” (34). He warns that if opportunity is lost in youth, it is impossible to regain:

But if will and wit, by farther age, be once allured from innocency, delighted in vain sights, filed with foul talk, crooked with willfulness, hardened with stubbornness, and let loose to disobedience, surely it is hard with gentleness, but impossible with severe cruelty, to call them back to good frame again (35).

Right guidance and catching the child at the most important stage in his life in order to lead him toward goodness and success are essential.

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Mulcaster’s views about the child are developed in *Positions*. He first makes a disclaimer about a discussion on the matter of the “soule” (26). He will not make “any anatomie” of the soul or engage in any philosophical dialectic, but only to “pick out some natural inclinations in the souls, which as they seeme to craue helpe of education, and nurture, so by education, and nurture, they do proue very profitable, both in priuate and publicke” (27). Mulcaster makes a number of important observations in the field of educational psychology. He sees in children “a capacity to perceive that which is taught them, and to imitate the foregoer” (27). He also recognizes that the child has a capacity to retain what he learns: “therfore their memorie would streight waye be furnished, with the verie best, seeing it is a treasurie” (27). Anyone who has been in the presence of a three-year old knows how quickly a child will imitate and repeat an inappropriate word from his word-hoard at an uncannily awkward time. The child deserves the best; Mulcaster’s point is well taken. He also writes that the child should feel that he is, in fact, learning. His mind should

not be idle as “it spoiles so soone” (27). This last idea returns to Aristotle’s idea of habituation. Mulcaster notes that it is important that the child should learn to “discern, what is good, and what is ill, which ought forthwith to be made acquainted with the best, by obedience and order, and dissuaded from the worse, by misliking and frowne” (27). The root of education, *educare*, is concerned with leading forth, and in this case, also with leading toward the right and good ends.

An understanding of the nature of the child should lead to the right methodology for teaching. Ascham’s treatise is clearly in favour of what twentieth-century behaviourists would call positive reinforcement. He says early on: “There is no such whetstone to sharpen a good wit and encourage a will to learning as is praise” (15). It is much better to use “allurements,” not fear -- a key tenet in his treatise. Ascham explains why love is “fitter than fear, gentleness better than beating, to bring up a child rightly in learning” (20). Although he recognizes that children make mistakes, he feels that the tutor should not chide hastily, or be discouraging, but “monish gently” (20). On the subject of beating, that occasioned and encouraged the writing of his treatise, he notes that the “great beaters do as oft punish nature as they do correct faults” (21). He further suggests that at times the motive for the beating of children is anger, a wholly inappropriate and unsatisfactory reason.

On the subject of physical means of disciplining children, Mulcaster’s views differ. He recognizes the value of the publishing of the school “ordinaunces,” and their being posted in a public place so that there will be no misunderstanding about the rules for conduct (276). This is a practice used in many schools in Ontario; there are codes of conduct, outlining rights,

responsibilities, and consequences for breaches and non-compliance. The consequences, in Mulcaster's school, will result in the use of the rod, with the number of smacks commensurate with the degree of the transgression (277). By the rod, he means "correction, and awe" whereby he can achieve obedience (277). Discipline by teachers in Ontario in the 1950s and 1960s was defined as that of a firm, judicious parent in the Education Act, but presumably what the province had in mind was somewhat different from Mulcaster's method: "For the priuate, what soeuer parentes say, my ladie *birchely* will be a gest at home, or else parentes shall not haue their willes" (277). He includes quite a catalogue for those neophytes who may not have quite mastered the arithmetic. Beginning with the commandments, he lists swearing, disobedience, lying, bearing false witness, and then proceeds to the "meaner heresies, trewentry, absence, tardies, and so forth" (278). For each misdemeanour, there shall be the appropriate "number of stripes also, immutable though not many" (278). But as if anticipating the need to circumvent howls of protest from the more liberal educationists, he does recommend the master's discreet use of the rod in order to "perfourme his duetie best, and still ...bring vp the best scolars" (279). Yet, like Ascham, he is not in favour of beating occasioned by the anger or ill-temper of a master: "I do not speake against discrete correction, but against hastinesse, and crueltie" (280). He is certainly no promoter of fear and violence against his charges, but concludes his discussion this way: "Wherefore I must needes say, that in any multitude the rod must needes rule: and in the leat paucitie it must be seen, how soeuer it sound" (283). It is hoped that the presence of the rod will act as a sufficient deterrent, and as an inducement to goodness. In practice, this is one of the few areas in modern education which has no equivalence with the ideas of the Renaissance educators: corporal punishment is simply not available to teachers in present-day Ontario. The concept of

the school as being *in loco parentis*, accordingly, has disappeared.

In fact, Mulcaster does not approach pedagogy in the same way as Ascham but he does have some important points to make. As he writes in *Positions*, an essential element of an educational system is that it should be a continuum; it is not to be discrete units, but should instead reflect a continuity from the elementary and infant school through to the grammar school. Equally important is the proper sequence of learning which “helpes the hole course of the after studie” (5). It is paramount that concepts and learning are well-ordered. He writes about readiness, a concept discussed earlier in this paper: “Too much haste is a foe, and ripeness is a friend” (5). He writes a little further in the work that when children are ready they “needeth no exhorting” (17). When the child has “a witte apte to conceive. . . and a body able to beare the travell,” he is ready for the appropriate stage in learning (18). The foundations for his pedagogical theory are given in this way: “*Nature* to lead it, *reason* to back it, *custome* to commend it, *experience* to allow it, and *profit* to preferre it” (120). In *Elementary* he defers to Quintilian: young minds can be fed with a variety of information, as long as it is organized (37). Sensible, reasonable learning is desirable so as not to deter early efforts. It is important that children understand; in other words, that they are not just learning by rote, but are using their reason (37-38). It is in *Positions* that Mulcaster’s views on what would more recently be called developmental psychology are made:

Now these naturall towardnesses being once espied, in what degree they rise, bycause ther is ods in children by nature, as in parentes by purchase, they must be followed with diligence, encreased by order, encouraged by comfort, till they come to their prooffe. (27)

The way to achieve the best results, writes Mulcaster, is to acknowledge these truths and to have the child exercise his innate abilities (28).

This idea of ability, aptness or readiness is evident in Ascham's work too, particularly with regard to long term success. He can see that often, in their later years, the now learned and best are not those who in youth were the fastest (21). Quick wits may be at first apt, but they may fade. Although the context is different, Lysander's words and metaphor make an interesting descant on Ascham: "So quick bright things come to confusion."²⁰ This idea of learning curves and rates is an important modern consideration too. Teachers realize that not all pupils learn at the same rate, and that sometimes the high-flyers end, in fact, like Icarus, while the less-noticed carry on and become steady, solid learners. Ascham's metaphor for the over-quick in youth (who become testy in later age) is drawn from nature. The tree in spring has fair blossoms and broad leaves, but it has only small and short-lived fruit in harvest (22). Ascham juxtaposes this portrait - which he paints in considerable detail -- to the "hard" wit which proves best "both for learning and the whole course of living." Such people -- "rough and somewhat staffish"-- are difficult to handle, but if treated "not overthwartly and against the wood, by the schoolmaster" become in the end "most happy for themselves and always best esteemed abroad in the world" (24).

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A thorough understanding of the nature of learning and good methodology is obviously fundamental to a good educational system, but of course there is the matter of what to teach. In Ontario in 2001 this is the single most important facet of the system. (Here is the problem of the

differences between the demands of the marketplace and the needs of education.) Curriculum debates have raged from the ancients to now; it is hard to imagine why they would cease. Both Ascham and Mulcaster have many things to say about the appropriate curricula in their envisioned (and practised) pedagogies.

Ascham does not lay out a curriculum which identifies all subject areas, but he is thorough in his discussion of language study which is central to a good education. In the first book of his work, he sets out his recommended steps, beginning with learning the parts of speech and syntax. He next explains the technique with which he is often identified -- double translation (14). The pupil translates an epistle by Cicero into English, gives it to his master who, after a suitable period of time -- at least an hour so that it is not as fresh in the memory of the boy-- gives it back so that it may be translated back into Latin. Although the first book ends with a long and vitriolic attack on Italy -- an attitude not uncommon in the England of that time -- a Godless place, in his estimation, he returns to language study in the second book (60-75).

Here he specifies suitable texts and authors and techniques. He earlier (in book one) makes it clear that students are not to speak Latin without sufficient knowledge as it will encourage bad habits. Speaking at table, for instance, as he tells: "that learned man Guillaume Budaeus...did bring to such an evil choice of words, to such a crooked framing of sentences, that no one thing did hurt or hinder him more all the days of his life afterward" (17). It is, therefore, crucial to the success of the programme that the master's Latin be perfect. He will read aloud from Cicero, Caesar, and some comedies by Terence or Plautus, carefully chosen to avoid

inappropriate material. An important point is that children are to read daily; translation daily is not necessary but actual reading is. This is something that some schools and systems have implemented in the 1980s and 1990s; an entire school stops other activities for a designated time during the day to just read for pleasure. Of course, this is different from the situation Ascham is describing, but it aims at making reading something one can enjoy and to which one can become habituated.

His discussion continues by referring to the pleasure derived from learning in the way he describes. This double translation method is superior because the pupil's mind is engaged: "learning is [not] tied only to their tongue and lips" as it is if they learn only rules and do not read and truly understand (79). Of course, his best advertisement for this method is the Queen. Ascham uses the example of Elizabeth who "never took yet Greek nor Latin grammar in her hand after the first declining of a noun and a verb" but did double translation of Greek in the mornings and of Latin in the afternoons (87). With this method (and with Ascham as her tutor) she attained a level of proficiency rarely attained "in both the universities or elsewhere in England" (87).

Ascham is sensitive to the needs of children, their capacity for learning, and the importance of engaging the intellect and imagination. He suggests a further method which addresses these aspects:

write you in English some letter, as it were from him to his father or to some other friend, naturally, according to the disposition of the child, or some tale, or fable, or plain

narration...and let him translate it into Latin (80).

Another recommendation, the necessity of which is obvious in our current system, is the need for daily writing. This, he rightly shows, is required for long term success and for ensuring a better memory. Not only does he make recommendations, but also injunctions against some unsound practices. Paraphrasing, for example, is criticized in two apt analogies. It is like turning gold and silver into brass and copper, or like pouring good wine from a silver decanter into a leather bottle (88). Of the practice of “Epitome” he has little good to say. Essentially, the condensing, abridging, or summarizing hurts learning if the one who is using it did not actually do the condensing. A modern day equivalent might be the use of Coles’ Notes as a substitute for the reading of a novel or play. In the matter of the intellect, Ascham also stresses the relationship between words and matter. If apt words are neglected and not used, ill thoughts will ensue, leading to poor judgment, and ending in the destruction of learning (115). This powerful idea is explored in a different, but equally important line of thinking by George Orwell in his essay *Politics and the English Language*.²¹

Ascham’s last main idea about the study of language concerns the importance of close reading. Textual analysis, although not for beginners in the study of language, “will bring forth more learning and breed truer judgment than any exercise that can be used” (118). The close examination of two versions considering alterations, omissions, additions, and syntax will yield fruit in learning. Anticipating criticism about his fastidious attention to these analyses, as he says, “in marking and piddling thus about the imitation of others,” he offers some advice. Some ignorant or idle student may complain “that the old worthy authors did never busy their heads and

wits in following so precisely either the matter what other men wrote or else the manner how other men wrote” (119). This complaint rings true today. Witness the astonishment of some students that Thomas Campion would want to pattern a poem after Catullus’s “My Sweetest Lesbia.” Or that sonnet form follows a form that others have used, developed and perfected. Or that the sound and sense lessons in Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism* and the cleverly disguised hexameter line serve precisely to demonstrate his points and are a way of recognizing a tradition and past masters (ll.362-374). Regarding specific authors, Ascham has a number of suggestions, but perhaps the principles of selection are more important than a list of his categories and particulars. He says:

we seek such one in our school to follow who is able always, in all matters, to teach plainly, to delight pleasantly, and to carry away by force of wise talk all that shall hear or read him, and is so excellent indeed as wit is able or wish can hope to attain unto (137).

Although he commends the chosen authors for various noble attributes, his hymn of praise is for Cicero. His apostrophe to Tully sums up his attitudes toward education in England:

And for learning, beside the knowledge of all learned tongues and liberal sciences, even your own books, Cicero, be as well read, and your excellent eloquence is well liked and loved and as truly followed in England at this day [as it ever has been since your time.] (151).

Sense, good matter, eloquence, and decorum are requirements for the proper choices for Ascham’s curriculum.

Mulcaster’s curriculum, although casting a broader net than Ascham’s, also stresses the

centrality of reading. In *Positions* he writes:

Amongst these my countreys most familiar principles, *reading* offereth her selfe first in the entrie.... For whether you marke the nature of the thing, while it is in getting, or the goodnesse therof when it is gotten, it must needs be the first, and the most frutefull principale, in training of the minde (29).

His reading programme includes daily spelling and “continuale reading, till partely by use, and partely by argument, the child get the habit, and cunning to read well, which being once gotten, what a cluster of commodities doth it bring with all?” (29-30). Reading opens up all aspects of life-- all knowledge he says-- and can expel ignorance. It is the leading principle in learning; from it proceed all other principles (30). But for his beginning readers, Mulcaster prefers English over Latin. His rationale is sensible. While England was Roman Catholic, Latin was the only language for learning. But now that England is “restored to libertie” her countrymen may “read that first, which [they] speake first”(30). But learning to read their mother tongue is not actually easier than Latin, he warns: “ Our spelling is harder, our pronouncing harsher, our syllabe hath commonly as many letters, as the whole Latin word hath” (31). He knows that children need to be able to practice writing their letters and words, but he also knows that writing requires some “strength of the hand, which is not so soone staid nor so stiffe to write” (32). As this skill--what present day educators would term small-muscle coordination-- develops more slowly than facility in speech, he wisely says that writing will follow reading. In concluding his thoughts here -- his ideas in *Elementary* notwithstanding -- reading and writing will be like wings to enable the child to venture further. Even for children who are not going to be magistrates in the commonwealth, these are life skills: “To write and read wel is a prety stocke for a poore boye to begin the world with all” (34).

In addition to comments on other parts of his curriculum in *Elementary* Mulcaster devotes many pages to the study of language, recommending it for its good results, its sensible, reasonable and natural approach, and its helpfulness to students (20). Most of his attention is given to reading and orthography, where he shows that there is too much variety, which in turn makes reading even more difficult (58). In the realm of word recognition, he is firmly in the camp of the proponents of phonics; children learn to join letters and sounds, building sentences from “syllables” and words (55). He also explains some terms and principles regarding punctuation, phonics, diphthongs, spelling rules (e.g. doubling final consonants in certain words before adding verb endings), and the use of prepositions among others; he even includes a “General Table,” a word list with notations (63-225). This handbook would be useful to many present-day teachers who could benefit by knowing the rules and principles of English in order to help their students make more sense of a sometimes baffling language. This standardizing of the vernacular is an important issue. English is not only a legitimate language, but also as seen previously in Elyot’s treatise, one worthy enough to use in learned and influential writing. Mulcaster writes:

I take this present period of our English tung to be the verie height therof, bycause I find it so excellentlie well fined, both for the bodie of the tung it self, and for the customarie writing therof, as either foren workmanship can giue it glosse, or as homewrought handling can giue it grace (159).

It is a noble language for discourse, and so it is worthy of study: “and whatsoever shall becom of the English state, the English tung cannot proue fairer, then it is at this daie, if it maie please our learned sort to esteme so of it, and bestow their trauell vpon such a subject” (159). Thus Mulcaster aligns himself with the pro-vernacular movement in Elizabethan England, a movement

intimately connected with pedagogy and the developing scientific outlook.

Mulcaster's curriculum in *Positions* promotes other subjects as well for a well-balanced education. Drawing is important in helping a child develop judgment of proportion (34). In fact, he asks, why should we not try to develop every part of the body and "every power of the soule to be fined to his best?" (35). The study of music, involving voice and instrument, is also recommended, since its pleasantness is a "medicine from heaven" (36). Aware of criticisms that music is a siren, diverting one from serious pursuits or giving too much pleasure, he calls it "the princesse of delites, and the delite of princes" (37). Mulcaster aims for balance; music is not to be condemned because it can be misused. He writes: "*Musick* will not harme thee, if thy behaufour be good, and thy conceit honest, it will not miscary thee" (39).

A well-balanced education, according to all these sixteenth-century authors, takes into account the entirety of the child--his mind, soul, and body. Ascham does not demand that young gentlemen "should always be poring on a book, and by using good studies should lose honest pleasure and haunt no good pastime" (52). Rather, he favours "a merry, pleasant, and playful nature, if no outrage be committed against law, measure, and good order" (52). The pastimes he suggests are many and varied: e.g. riding, running, wrestling, swimming, "comely" dancing, singing, playing instruments, tennis, and those exercises connected with war (53). Mulcaster, in *Positions*, stresses that discipline of the body is needed "bycause all men neede helpe, for necessarie health, and ready execution of their naturall actions: but particularly for those men, whose life is in leasure, whose braynes be most busied, and their wittes most wearied" (42).

This, of course, includes students. The sorts of physical activities he suggests parallel Ascham's recommendations, but there are some interesting additions. He sees that the benefit of exercise is to increase breathing, and suggests three stages in his aerobic programme, what current instructors will call warm-up, lively exercise, and "warm-down." Other interesting activities include loud speaking and loud singing, as well as "loude and soft reading," said to benefit the blood, veins, and arteries (55-60). It is difficult to imagine his next recommendation in a curriculum or course of study in Ontario. Laughing: it stirs the heart, moves the blood, and is good against colds (63). Although Mulcaster's section on dancing is not as elaborate as Elyot's, it nevertheless covers the arguments for and against it. He is in favour of it because its physical benefits are numerous. In addition, it concerns itself with harmony, reason, and proportion (74). He concludes the chapter: "Thus much for *dauncing*, as the motion is for health, and the meaning for good" (75). As one sees throughout these Renaissance tracts, the principles of teaching concern themselves with reason, balance, continuity, and the good of the commonwealth.

The penultimate topic for this chapter concerns the relationships between parents and teachers. A point made by Vives arises again in Ascham's *The Schoolmaster*. Sometimes parents are too fond, he says, to choose a fitting teacher, but an additional difficulty occurs when a father does not recognize innate ability in his son:

A child that is still, silent, constant, and somewhat hard of wit is either never chosen by the father to be made a scholar, or else when he cometh to the school, he is smally regarded, little looked unto. He lacketh teaching, he lacketh couraging, he lacketh all things (25).

Here are the consequences of not matching aptitude and ability with the appropriate choices for the child. The analogy Ascham uses is that of the good horseman “who is skillful to know and able to tell others, how, by certain sure signs, a man may choose a colt that is like to prove another day excellent for the saddle” (26). Since this discernment is not necessarily present in all parents, the good master will use his expertise and acumen to assess the abilities and capabilities of the child, thus minimizing the disappointments for both parents and children.

Mulcaster too has instructive things to say about the relationships between parents and children. In the *Elementary*, he addresses an issue which has been a point of contention in Ontario for a number of years. Morals and virtue are still chiefly the domain of parents, he says (4). Principally in the 1980s, “values education” took a prominent place in the curriculum. Although it has lost this particular title, the idea remains, as one can see in the reading of the Ministry of Education’s documents such as *The Common Curriculum*. Mulcaster goes on to write :

As for knowledge, whereby to encrease the childe understanding, that is assigned to the teacher alone, as proper to his office without participation of anie parent, tho a wise and learned parent be the verie best part of the verie best teacher (5).

But this is not to say that parents have no part in the child’s entire education; Mulcaster is quite clear about this in *Positions*. Since the master is no “absolute potentate in our common weal, to dispose of wittes, and to sorte mens children, as he liketh best, but in nature of a counsellour, to ioine with the parent, if he will be advised”(154-55). This idea of a parent-teacher conference is, as we see in current education, extremely important, since it allows for an exchange of ideas and

perspectives in view of finding the right directions for the child. Indeed, he writes, there is a need for parents and teachers to be “lynked in amitie, and contynual conference, for their common care” (156). This line of communication is crucial to determining the best for the child: “Wherein ther wilbe no error if the parent be wise, and the maister be honest” (25). He takes the idea one step further though. Parents, teachers, and neighbours all have a part in the proper education of the child. As it is in the interests of a good society, all should take a role to help in the child’s upbringing (28).

The last topic for discussion is one raised in Mulcaster’s *Positions*. It concerns practices in teaching and the desirability of uniformity in the country. He writes that at this time there is too much variety in teaching, and suggests a number of reasons for this problem. Teachers’ own training and reading might be problematic, as well as the difficulty in attempting to accommodate various parents’ choices and demands (266). But, he reiterates, it is for the good of the country to have “some vniforme kinde of teaching set downe by authoritie” (267). A common curriculum is recommended: “consent in knowledge will plant *vniformitie*” (267). Here he is anticipating a national department of education which would, if not actually determine, at least ensure continuity in the country:

Which consent, as it must be enforeced by authoritie, so must it proceede from some likenesse of abilitie in teachers, namely in that thing wherof they are teachers: though both in executing the same, and some other qualities they may differ much (267).

As a note here in passing, we know that in 2001 England does, in fact, have a national curriculum -- not without its detractors -- while in Canada, education has been within the

jurisdiction of the individual provinces. As Mulcaster foresees the desired state of things, the following can be prescribed:

both what and how to teach, with all the particular circumstances, so farre as they ordinarily do fall within common compasse, and best be seeme the best ordered schooles, which both the meane teacher may wel attaine vnto, and the cunning maister may rest content with (268).

These concerns and proposals from 1581 are interestingly proximate to those in Ontario in 2001, although perhaps these have been rallying cries from many both before Mulcaster's time and in the intervening years.

As a way to ensure the uniformity of education, Mulcaster shows that inspectors are to oversee the delivery of the curriculum (269). But this is not the only way forward. He recommends conferences between teachers "wherby the generall traine is generally furthered" (289). As he points out, conferences among the same professions are not uncommon: consider medicine, law, and the church. All these practitioners meet with their peers for the common good, and to know that they are moving in the same direction (289). So should teachers, writes Mulcaster:

And do ye thinke *that* conference among teachers would not do much good in the traine...where it is vsed among teachers for the common good, it profiteth generally by sending abroad some common direction (289).

This professional activity is an important development in the evolution of teaching as a real career. It is not a place for the displaced or disappointed; it is a profession.

This project has looked already at the attributes of the good teacher, those things needed for the proper upbringing of children. These traits were outlined in the discussion of the educational works of Vives and Erasmus. They are understood through the demands of the understanding of developmental psychology, proper methodology, appropriate curriculum, and a general sensitivity to the needs of children. Hence another examination of the “good teacher” is not needed.

This chapter on the Renaissance writers began with a satire. It seems appropriate to close it in the same vein.

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The satirizing of teachers does not mean that all are to be tarred with the same brush or pilloried. Since the point of satire is to ridicule folly and vice, it is the worst of the profession who will be mocked. As we have seen in the writings of the previous five humanist pedagogues, at least some practitioners worked hard, were sensitive to the needs of their pupils, and taught well. It is, of course, the chasm between the talented and excellent teachers, and the execrable ones that provides the nourishment for satire, and our enjoyment.

Sir Philip Sidney’s *The Lady of May* is an amusing squib which revolves around a difficult problem. A good woman has a worthy daughter who is beloved of two men. She beseeches “her most excellent Majesty”²² to aid her in the dilemma of choosing the best husband, a problem made more difficult by the fact that the daughter likes them equally, and that each suitor has a “partaker” to speak on his behalf. The schoolmaster Doctor Rombus is also present “who being

fully persuaded of his own learned wisdom, [comes] thither with his authority to part their fray”

(6). He is called upon by the old father Lalus, “one of the substantiallest shepherds” to “tell the whole case, for [he] can much better vent the points” than old Lalus (6). Far from being wise and learned, Rombus is a bombastic fool speaking utter nonsense as his opening speech proves:

Now the thunderthumping Jove transfund his dotes into your
excellent formosity, which have with your resplendent beams
thus segregated the enmity of these rural animals. (6)

Thus begins “his learned oration.” He next declares his credentials for representing a wise viewpoint in the fray, but in doing so reveals his gross ineptitude for both public discourse and disputation, and for teaching:

I am... a schoolmaster, that is to say, a pedagogue; one
not a little versed in the disciplinating of the juvental fry,
wherein (to my laud I say it) I use such geometrical
proportion, as neither wanteth mansuetude nor correction. (6)

He shows off his knowledge of rhetoric with his use of a litotes and litters his speeches with Latin phrases and sentences. It is clear that although he estimates his abilities highly, his prized possession is severely flawed. When dismissed by the Queen as a “tedious old fool,” he voices his outrage in a misquoting of Cicero’s Oration against Catiline: “*O Tempori, O Moribus!*” (7). Not only is his mastery of Latin highly doubtful, his pedagogy, which seems to reside in geometry, is obtuse. His method of logical discussion and argument appears to proceed by means of “divisionating” and “particlizing” (10). This is obviously no way to train young minds to think, but thinking is not one of the skills that Rombus possesses.

It is possible that Sidney wrote this piece for the Queen’s visit to the Earl of Leicester at

Wanstead, in 1578. Elizabeth was well educated in many areas including the classics, as we know from Ascham's description of her rigorous training and her excellent mastery. A pastoral entertainment that included an ineffectual, pompous pedant, contemptuous of his rural surroundings, might have been an occasion for considerable laughter.

Two of Shakespeare's characters are welcomed into this college of pedants and pedagogues. Sir Hugh Evans from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Holofernes from *Love's Labors Lost* are two more unwittingly amusing teachers.

Sir Hugh Evans, the Welsh parson in the play, is the schoolmaster, and therefore in charge of curriculum and pedagogy in his school. When William, Mistress Page's son appears unexpectedly, she calls on the parson to test her son on his "accidence" (IV. 1. 13). William is about to be quizzed on his Latin grammar. Although it is possible that part of the satire concerns the "Welshness" of Sir Hugh, the fact remains that his pronunciation of Latin is appalling. As Ascham has earlier said, the teachers of Latin should be excellent speakers of the language, in order to be good models for their pupils. William's answer regarding declination is :
 "Singulariter, nominativo, hic, haec, hoc." But Sir Hughes's response to this indicates his shortcomings: "Nominativo, hig, hag, hog." After Evans modulates his declension into "*hung hang, hog,*" the exchange dissolves into the bawdy riposte that ensues: "*Hang-hog* is Latin for bacon, I warrant you" (IV. 1. 41). Sir Hugh is an example of the incompetent master. His students have been given liberty to play, a fact previously unbeknownst to their parents, and he is also not wholly in charge of education under his direction.

Holofernes is lampooned and skewered as the pedantic scholar. He liberally peppers his

English with Latin in his conversation with Dull and Nathaniel:

Most barbarous intimation! Yet a kind of insinuation,
as it were, *in via*, in way, of explication; *facere*, as it were
replication, or rather, *ostentare*, to show, as it were, his
inclination -- after his undressed, unpolished, uneducated,
unpruned, untrained, or, rather, unlettered, or, ratherest,
unconfirmed fashion - to insert again my hand *credo* for a deer. (IV.ii.13-16)

The ostentation of his verbiage makes him an obvious source of amusement. To point to just one of its characteristics; his “latinity” causes him to invent inappropriate English formations, such as “ratherest.” His pomposity is heightened when he responds to what he takes as flattery on his “extemporal epitaph on the death of the deer”(IV.ii.47-48). He consequently gives a paean of false modesty to all present --but mainly himself:

This is a gift that I have, simple, simple; a foolish
extravagant spirit, full of forms, figures, shapes,
objects, ideas, apprehensions, motions, revolutions.
These are begot in the ventricle of memory, nourished
in the womb of *pia mater*, and delivered upon the
mellowing of occasion. But the gift is good in those
in whom it is acute, and I am thankful for it. (IV.ii.63-69)

Holofernes has a rather inflated view of his “witte” --aptitude or talent as we have seen previously. It is not actually his God-given talent that is acute, but his own self-satisfied pseudo-intellect. He meets his match, however, in Moth, a page to Armado. Moth tells the Don that indeed the schoolmaster is “lettered”: “He teaches boys the horn-hook” (V.i .44). After Moth has tricked the teacher into sounding like a sheep (“Ba”), he says mockingly, “You hear his learning” (V. i.47-8). After another clever sally in which Moth triumphs, Holofernes attempts to

save face: “Thou disputes like an infant. Go whip thy gig” (V. I.59-60). But Moth, in the realm of disputations, has the upper hand here; in the chess match of wits, Moth has checkmated him. In addition to this defeat, Holofernes, unknowingly, has had aspersions cast his way on another subject. A double entendre is the place for this. Nathaniel’s parishioners do benefit from Holofernes: “for their sons are well tutored by you and their daughters profit very greatly under you. You are a good member of the commonwealth” (IV. ii. 71-73). The audience may well take this as satire about the supposed moral superiority of the teacher. It may be hinting at the hypocrisy regarding the virtue which is expected, taught, and encouraged, and the sometimes moral turpitude of those in honoured positions. Holofernes, oblivious to possible criticism and censure, leaves the scene with a seeming victory, but of course undermines this with his highly ironic valediction: “*Pauca verba*” (IV. ii.158). Here is a picture of the “Schoolmaster Overdone.”

These three satirical portraits emphasize some of the main concerns about education in Renaissance England. The competence of teachers is of prime importance to the efficacy and worthiness of education and learning. Deficiencies here will have a profound impact on the system and its success. Sound pedagogical practices as well as sensitivity to the needs of students, both their individual psychological and sociological exigencies, are required for a healthy learning environment. These three lampoons, dating from 1578, probably 1600, and possibly as early as 1588 (which would make *Love’s Labour’s Lost* Shakespeare’s earliest comedy, or as late as 1594) indicate that education is still a hotbed of controversy. Although many knowledgeable theorists had written on the subjects of curriculum and practice, it is clear that the position of the schoolmaster is vulnerable to attack. The disparity between theory and practice, or between

theory and reality, or between expectations and practice, seems to be the locus for disparagement and discontent. The subsequent calls for reform, and the prescriptions and recommendations do not always have the desired results: i.e. immediate amelioration.

Chapter Four

“The readiness is all.” *Hamlet*, (V.ii.211)

This last chapter returns to the nineteenth century for an examination of educational issues seen through the lens of three novels, and concludes with discussion of the current state of pedagogy in Ontario. The nineteenth century is revisited because it is the period of a proliferation of public schools as well as a time of confluence of old and new practices in education.

An obvious choice from the middle of the century is Dickens’s *Hard Times*, with a character who surely epitomizes the worst of his times, Thomas Gradgrind. Visiting his model school, he demonstrates that both his pedagogy (if he actually has any) and his practice are flawed. The former concerns itself with sterile definitions which permit no actual knowledge or experience; the latter excludes all sensitivity to children’s understanding, nature, and needs. Bitzer’s adherence to the formulaic definition of the horse is rewarded, while Sissy Jupe’s true understanding and knowledge is scorned and denigrated. Gradgrind, “a man of realities,” has, as one of his tasks in life, the job of expunging “tender young imaginations.”²³ Far removed from the enlightened notions about the nature of children seen previously in the works by Ascham and Mulcaster, Gradgrind views his young charges as “little pitchers before him, who [are] to be filled so full of facts” (48). It is clear that Gradgrind’s approach is the one sanctioned by the authorities in the society Dickens describes, as the government officer present echoes Gradgrind’s approach, and Mr. M’Choakumchild embarks on his career, filling “all the vessels ranged before him” (53).

Dickens's sympathies are quite clear as his omniscient narrator addresses the M'Choakumchild teachers of the world:

When from thy boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar brim full
by and by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the
robber Fancy lurking within--or sometimes only maim him and
distort him! (53)

These practices are designed to ruin children's natural imagination and curiosity. Gradgrind, the novel shows later, pays a heavy penalty for his failure to truly understand the nature of children, including his own, as Louisa is deeply unhappy in a loveless match with a scoundrel, and Tom becomes a thief. The novel shows, among other things, the importance of sensitivity to the nature and needs of children.

Other novels by Dickens deal with education, for example poor Paul Dombey at Dr. Blimber's school in *Dombey and Son* and the schoolmaster Squeers in *Nicholas Nickleby*, but the novel for discussion here is *David Copperfield*. David's wretched experience in being tutored at home by his bullying step-father, Edward Murdstone, is catastrophic. A curriculum that is notably strict, rigorous, and demanding from the teacher's point of view is long, sometimes unintelligible, and a drudgery to a little boy who has previously been interested in reading and natural history, among other things. Unreasonable expectations lead to failure which results in severe punishment for the unsuccessful Davy. It is not only home schooling that David is exposed to. Later, he encounters the teacher Mr. Creakle at Salem House. The practices of this purveyor of education are deeply suspect; he tames his charges with the cane and delights in tormenting them. As he

makes the rounds of the schoolroom, “half the establishment [is] writhing and crying, before the day’s work [begins].”²⁴ The students, freed for a half-holiday, are ordered back into school because of inclement weather, and are supervised by the hapless Mr. Mell. The classroom is in chaos; the teacher is the victim as the boys recognize the power that they now have, given the defeatist attitude of the milder teacher. Their taunting, laughing, dancing about, and howling indicate a lack of respect which is obviously not being fostered by either teacher’s approaches or practices (148).

The last school experience for examination is David’s experience at the school of Dr. Strong. Mr. Wickfield, one recalls, asks Miss Betsey Trotwood her motive in having her nephew “put in a school where he is thoroughly well taught and well treated.” Her surprised response is “Why, to make the child happy and useful” (277). David’s subsequent schooling with Dr. Strong replaces the humiliation, fear, and ignorance of previous days with confidence and happiness as he and the other young scholars “learn with a good will, desiring to do [the school] credit” (294). Far from indicating that public education is necessarily dismal, Dickens shows that careful, reflective pedagogy and practice can lead to success for all concerned.

The last novel for discussion is the one first examined in Chapter One, *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley’s novel concerns itself with many ideas, not the least of which is education. There are four characters whose education is closely scrutinized: Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, Henry Clerval, and the monster.

Walton reflects in his letters to his sister that his “education was neglected” (9). Enjoined against going seafaring by the wishes of his father which are enforced by his uncle, he turns to poetry. He tells that he became a poet and for “one year lived in a Paradise of [his] own creation” (2). Later, he returns to the notion of travel and educates himself in mathematics and physical sciences. He recognizes in retrospect that his self-education had no direction: “for the first fourteen years of my life I ran wild on a common, and read nothing but our uncle Thomas’s books of voyages” (4). At the age of twenty-eight, he feels strongly the effects of a lack of structure and order to his acquisition of knowledge; he writes, “[I] am in reality more illiterate than many schoolboys of fifteen” (4). Victor realizes that Walton seeks “knowledge and wisdom,” but hopes that he is spared the serpent’s sting in the gratification of his wishes (13). In Walton’s search for glory and knowledge he finds himself in the Arctic rescuing a ruined man pursuing a created “daemon.” Victor warns Walton, but it is already too late, “how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge” (31). Walton is an example of a disappointed man who suffers as a result of a faulty education. In his last letter to his sister, he says, “I have lost my hopes of utility and glory” (160). His is a life manqué.

Victor, too, engages in self-education, reading first Agrippa, about which his father remarks, that it is “sad trash” (20). He continues with Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus; he is left untutored “to struggle with a child’s blindness, added to a student’s thirst for knowledge” (21). The subject of appropriate material in a curriculum is broached when Victor goes to university. He has previously thought that he was following in the footsteps of the ancients, but discovers

that these are not in favour, their notions debunked harshly by Krempe and gently by Waldman. Having previously been “floundering desperately in a very slough of multifarious knowledge guided by an ardent imagination and childlike reasoning,” he finds a new direction (22). His “mission statement” emerges: “One thought... one purpose. More, far more, will I achieve... I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation” (28). The enormity of his ambition and his subsequent creation, and his creation’s path of destruction, is conveyed to an awed Walton in the closing pages of the novel. Victor, humbled and destroyed, is described by Walton: “What a glorious creature he must have been in the days of his prosperity, when he is thus noble and godlike in ruin! He seems to feel his own worth, and the greatness of his fall” (156). It is an oversimplification to say that this catastrophe is the result of an inappropriate education, but it seems clear that careful tutelage may have prevented the destruction caused by Victor’s dire experiment. In his self-condemnation, he says, “I trod heaven in my thoughts, now exulting in my powers, now burning with the idea of their effects. From my infancy I was imbued with high hopes and a lofty ambition” (157). Unhindered self-education has led him to his chilled and chilly end.

Victor’s dear friend, Henry Clerval, having finally convinced his father “that all necessary knowledge was not comprised in the noble art of book-keeping,” arrives at Ingolstadt to “undertake a voyage of discovery to the land of knowledge” (37). His direction is quite different from Victor’s though. He eschews natural science for Oriental languages, intending to make himself a master thereof. In fact, his interest in the Persian, Arabic, and Sanscrit languages induces a study of the same for Victor; language study offers him solace from the horror of his

recent creation. The past is a comfort from the intolerable future. Clerval's purpose in his study of these languages is not inglorious, but also not grandiose. He wishes to know them and become a master of them. In his study, he does not wish to change the world; he wishes to know about it. As Victor tells later, Clerval's design is to visit India and "assist the progress of European colonisation and trade," (perhaps seen through the twentieth-first century's lens as not wholly neutral and unambitious in its approach), but he is using his knowledge for works sanctioned by his society (115). He is a person whose intellect and spirit are admired and valued by Victor. How terrible it is that this person is the one destroyed by the monster because Victor, although having the capability to create the mate for the monster, chooses to desist, and to destroy instead his instruments of creation. Clerval represents respect for the past and learning, decency, and optimism; he is inevitably the victim of the results of pride, modernism, and unrestraint. The point of Mary Shelley's homily needs no underlining.

Victor's monster is also worthy of study, as he has a distinct purpose for his education: it is for life and revenge. He is wholly self-educated, unbeknownst to anyone until he tells his tale to his creator. The kennel/hovel where he receives his education is a comparative paradise to his living in the forest. It is here that he learns language, first nouns, common (fire, milk, bread, wood) and proper (Agatha, Felix, Safie), then adjectives (good, dearest, unhappy) (78-79). His language acquisition is not transactional, but an understanding based on demonstration and signifiers (a thing equals a word which in turn equals a thing). He recognizes, though, to his chagrin, that without the nurture of careful parents, he can only be a "miserable, unhappy wretch" (85). Understanding language is not enough. He then learns to write. It is, however, when he

finds the portmanteau with three key works that the monster's education really begins. Shelley's choice of works for him is very interesting: the triad is *Paradise Lost*, a volume of Plutarch's *Lives*, and the *Sorrows of Werter* [sic]. Goethe's romance arouses empathy as well as existential questions. Plutarch elicits admiration for the heroes of past ages, thus elevating the monster's spirit. Milton's work, however, is the one which commands "wonder and awe" (92). The daemon feels that like Adam, he has no link to "any other being in existence" (92). Adam is "allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature" (92). The daemon, on the other hand, is separated from all others and feels that his maker is more like Satan than like God. His desperately acquired knowledge makes him aware of the possibilities of human life and more unhappy than previously. The monster's education, although desired and purposeful, is lacking in direction, tutelage, and pedagogy. His work, in retaliation for lost opportunities in learning and life, is done with the murders of Victor's loved ones, and finally, his last victim, Victor. His intention is to collect his "funeral pile" and find his rest in death (166). Victor's monster, previously falsely "nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion," (165) has paid back his creator for his careless act of creation and for the denial of the necessities of life: nurture and proper education.

This project's, albeit cursory, examination of some novels of the nineteenth century reveals three approaches to the education of young people: a strict and limiting school, a benevolent institution with children's natures and best interests at heart, and the progressive school of self-invention, in which the past is discouraged, and modernity and experimentation are lauded.

A further look at experimentation returns to the ideas examined in Chapter One regarding the King Alfred School. A more recent example can be found in Ontario in the late 1960s and 1970s in primary and elementary education in the wake of the Hall-Dennis report. The underlying premises to this tract were that education had prior to this time been a strangulation of children's creativity and imagination, and that allowing children greater freedom would lead to their choosing how and when to learn what they needed and wanted. In practice, this often resulted in children aged five, in an unstructured Kindergarten class for two and a half hours a day, choosing their own education. Some innovators conducting these classes, unmindful of the needs and capacities of children of this age, unwittingly created classrooms of chaos. Margaret Fletcher, a professor in primary education at the time, saw many of these scenes of failure. One anecdote will suffice. She told of going into a Kindergarten class in which pandemonium reigned. Some children were in the "Housekeeping" centre, throwing cushions, pillows, and assorted bric-a-brac, others at the music centre playing xylophones, drums, and triangles, others pacing out the length of the classroom as part of a maths activity, still others arrayed about the room at the sand, water, or paints centres while the teacher walked about and encouraged all. A lone child stood apart in the midst of the activity and cacophony and sobbed. Ms. Fletcher tried to console her by saying, "Don't worry, dear, it will be over soon." She recognized a flagrant disregard for the real needs of the child in what was then labelled as "child centred" education. This experiment in education exacted a considerable toll in a number of cases: indirection, misdirection, and lack of guidance and teaching (e.g. the teaching of spelling and grammar seen as restricting a child's creativity and productivity). This is not to say that new methods or pedagogy are not desired or are necessarily doomed, but it is imperative that innovations be thoroughly and thoughtfully considered, with

reference to the predecessors and history.

With the idea of innovation in mind, this project returns to the present state of education in Ontario. The new curricula set out “detailed descriptions of the knowledge and skills required for each grade”²⁵ in each subject. In their laudable attempt to standardize and ensure consistency throughout the province, the writers/educators have, in some cases, sacrificed good pedagogy for expediency. A concept which Ascham and Mulcaster readily acknowledge is that of “readiness”, that is, ideas/concepts which are commensurate with the mental or intellectual and psychological level of the child. The two documents examined briefly here are *Mathematics (Grades 1-8)* and *Science and Technology (Grades 1-8)*.²⁶

These documents set out the features of the curricula, the strands (topics), and the achievement levels, among other things. The expectations for achievement are, in all cases, worded in this manner: “By the end of Grade 1, students will...” (Math. 12). Only a few examples from each document will be used here to illustrate the necessary points.

The Mathematics curriculum identifies five strands. In Grade One, (Number Sense and Numeration) students will “use mathematical language to identify and describe numbers to 50 in real-life situations” and will “describe their thinking as they solve problems” (12-13). These two expectations--two only of 26-- seem inappropriate: the first operates on a level of abstraction that few six year olds can meet, and the second requires metacognition which is also an unlikely attained level of thinking. Again, looking at the Grade 1 section, one sees that in the

Measurement strand, the student will “estimate and measure the passage of time using non-standard units” and “demonstrate an understanding of the passage of time by comparing the duration of various activities (e.g. walking home will take as long as watching one television show” (29). The concept of relative time is an abstraction that is difficult for many adults, let alone Grade One children --besides the fact that a “television show” is of variable length. The last example is from the Data Management and Probability strand for the same grade (three of 13 expectations) . Students will “pose questions about data gathered (e.g. why are so many students wearing running shoes ?)”, “collect first-hand data by counting objects, conducting surveys, measuring, and performing simple experiments”, and “use events from meaningful experiences to discuss probability (e.g. it will never snow here in July)” (62). In question here is not the notion of consistent curriculum for a province’s children, but the suitability of the tasks to the mental development and capability of the child.

The *Science and Technology* curriculum, similarly, has five strands. Again, only a few examples will be used. “Energy and Control” for Grade One indicates that the student will “describe the different forms of energy used in a variety of everyday devices (e.g. coiled springs in wind-up toys, wood in fireplaces)” and “record relevant observations, findings, and measurements using written language... and charts (e.g. create an energy poster illustrating the various forms of energy used in daily life and how they are controlled)” (54). Apart from the fact that these examples may have little connection to the student’s daily life, they make unrealistic assumptions regarding the ability of a six year old to form generalizations and abstractions.

Lest it seem that the anomalies reside solely in the first grade, three further examples from the intermediate level are instructive. The document tells us that “particle theory and the distinction between heat and temperature, formerly taught in Grade 10, are now introduced in Grade 7” (5), and that Grade 6 includes an introduction to astronomy, which had been an optional topic in Grade 10 since 1987, but is actually taught now in Grade 9 (5). In Grade Eight, “Energy and Control” deals with optics. Students “will compare the properties of visible light with the properties of other types of electromagnetic radiation, including infrared and ultraviolet rays, X-rays, microwaves, and radio waves” and “describe how incandescent, fluorescent, and phosphorescent sources produce light,” only two of the 22 expectations of this strand. It is interesting to note that these topics were previously taught (from the 1960s to 90s) at the Grade 10-11 level.

Three important adjectives used in the foregoing and other provincial documents referred to in this project are “rigorous,” “demanding,” and “stringent.” It is essential, however, to balance the demands for rigour with an understanding of mental processes, levels of understanding and abstract thinking, and intellectual readiness. Sound pedagogy ought not to be sacrificed on the altar of convenience and expediency.

The specific “knowledge and skills” laid out in the new curricula are deemed by the policy makers those that students must and will learn and develop. These will enable the pupils to “be productive members of society” (*S&T* p.3) and “help them compete in a global economy, and allow them to lead lives of integrity and satisfaction, both as citizens and as individuals” (*M* p.4).

This latter goal has not changed substantially since the days of Vives, Elyot, Ascham, and Mulcaster. The addition here in the twenty-first century is the concept of competition in a global economy. The fact that these curriculum documents are presented under the aegis and imprimatur of the Minister of Education and Training is indicative of a considerable change in focus. The idea of training presupposes an end. But surely it is more prudent not to attempt to prepare students for positions and jobs which may not even exist at the time of their education. On the role of teachers, these documents have only a little to say. In *Mathematics*, for example, there are only three sentences. The following is apposite for the discussion here: “Teachers are responsible for developing a range of instructional strategies based on sound learning theory” (4). But as demonstrated above, sound practices would include matching intellectual tasks with maturation and intellectual readiness. In a number of cases in the new curricula, there are serious flaws that one hopes careful, reflective and skillful teachers will be able to redress.

Unlike the theorists and practitioners in the Renaissance, these present writers make no references to specific pedagogy or to seminal theorists such as Plato, Piaget, Montessori, Froebel, or Ryerson. They point in a direction away from traditional models and approaches without actually mentioning them. It seems that without antecedents, these policy makers are inventing the territory. If this is “Frankeneducation,” all those involved must remain vigilant. Mulcaster explained education as “the bringing up of one, not to live alone, but amongst others” (185). The Renaissance view saw the whole child, taking into account his mind and body. His education was for himself and for the good of society. It offered a balance between rigour and reasonable pacing, and sought to match skills and knowledge with the child’s mental aptitude, maturity, and

intellectual capabilities. It is to be hoped that the current “vision,” as *The Common Curriculum* puts it, leads not toward a “brave new world,” but to a rewarding and desirable education for its citizens.

Endnotes

- 1 Oswyn Murray, "The voice of Isocrates," *TLS* August 6, 1999: 3.
- 2 Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary* (Magnolia N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993) p.28.
- 3 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994) p.19. Subsequent references to *Frankenstein* are from this edition, and are included in the text.
- 4 *The Common Curriculum, Policies and Outcomes, Grades 1-9* (Queen's Printer of Ontario, 1995). The following quotations are all from this document. Page number references are given in order of appearance in the paper. P.4, p.4, p.3, p.6, p.7, p.7 .p.8, p.8.,p.8, p.8.
- 5 Melanie Phillips, "Without God or rod," *TLS* July 10, 1998: 11. All references to this review are from the same page of the journal.
- 6 Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly and Other Writings*, ed. Robert Adams (New York: Norton, 1989) pp.7-8. Subsequent references to *Folly* are from this edition.
- 7 Desiderius Erasmus, *Desiderius Erasmus concerning the Aim and Method of Education*, ed. William Woodward (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1964) p.183. Subsequent references to *the Aim and Method* are from this edition.
- 8 Juan Luis Vives, *Vives: On Education*, trans. Foster Watson, (Cambridge: University Press, 1913), p.62. Subsequent references to *Vives* are from this edition.
- 9 Aristotle, "Habit and Virtue", *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life*, ed.Christina Sommers, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,1989), p.490.
- 10 Erasmus, "Letter to John and Stanislaus Boner", *English Humanism Wyatt to Cowley*, ed. Joanna Martindale, (London:Croom Helm,1985), p.60.
- 11 Erasmus, *Desiderius Erasmus concerning the Aim and Method of Education*, ed.William Woodward, (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1964), p.162. Subsequent references are from this edition.
- 12 Erasmus, "Pueris Statim" in *Aim and Method*, p.184.
- 13 Erasmus, "Pueris Statim" p.203.
- 14 Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons* (Toronto: Irwin, 1963) pp.3-4.

- 15 Mulcaster, *Positions wherein those primitive circumstances be examined, which are necessarie for the training vp of children* [a.k.a. *The training up of Children*], facs. of London 1581 ed., (Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, 1971) p. 173.
- 16 Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke named the Governour*, ed. Donald W. Rude (New York: Garland, 1992) p. 5. All subsequent references to Elyot are from this edition.
- 17 Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel (1782-1852), father of the concept of the garden for children -- a place of learning and delight-- commonly known in education as Kindergarten, a name he coined in 1840. Drawing on Comenius, Rousseau and others, he developed the theory of the “inner unfolding” of the child. His work inspired the influential American educationist, John Dewey.
- 18 “And David danced before the LORD with all his might.” 2 Sam. 6:14.
- 19 Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster (1570)*, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967) p. 50.
- 20 *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, I.i. 149.
- 21 George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language, Thinking Through the Essay*, ed. Judith Barker-Sandbrook (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1993) pp. 12-24.
- 22 Sir Philip Sidney, *The Lady of May, Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan Jones, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 5. Subsequent references are included in the text.
- 23 Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 48. Subsequent references are included in the text.
- 24 Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 141. Subsequent references are included in the text.
- 25 Province of Ontario, Ministry of Education and Training, *Mathematics: The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8*, 1997, p.3.
- 26 Province of Ontario, Ministry of Education and Training, *Science and Technology: The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8*, 1998.

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