Victorian Pedagogy—Then and Now

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Thud, clomp, clack, creak. Although the students are not speaking, the sound of their footsteps on the wooden floor disturb the enforced quiet of the Victorian classroom (Fig. 1). As they file in, the students pass the very stern Miss Perkins, who is inspecting the pupils' appearances through glasses positioned midway down her nose. Miss Perkins herself, dressed in a full-length skirt and a high-necked blouse, stands next to the chalkboard, on which she has written the morning's lesson. Two students point to the dunce cap sitting on a stool by the chalkboard, causing more students to laugh. Miss Perkins hits the ground with her pointer to scold them, which only makes it harder for the students to contain their laughter.

The students take their seats. Because the sloping desks and chairs are connected, some students contort their bodies to adapt to the fixed-size units. Without being told to do so, a few students lift the lids of their desks and pull out their slate writing boards, much to the consternation of Miss Perkins. She hits the ground with her pointer once again. The students look up in a mixture of amusement and fear. From their seats, the most imposing feature of the room is Stanford's General Map of the British Isles, which towers over Miss Perkins, who stands to its right near the entrance to the classroom. To the left of the map is a portrait of Queen Victoria, presiding over the room with stately authority.

(Fig. 1. The Victorian classroom, Ragged School Museum. © Kevin A. Morrison. Courtesy of Shendrew Balendran.)

Once the students are all seated, Miss Perkins makes her way to the centre of the classroom. She instructs her pupils to lift the lids of their sloping desks and take out their writing slates and chalk (Fig. 2). She then begins a lesson in arithmetic. As Miss Perkins dictates mathematical principles, she hits the chalkboard with her pointer. Some students react nervously, almost paralyzed by wondering how to proceed. Others harness their anxiety about the lesson, writing down mathematical problems on their slates and applying the rules to solve them.

(Fig. 2. The Victorian classroom, Ragged School Museum. © Kevin A. Morrison. Courtesy of Shendrew Balendran.)

This scene—to which I will return—depicts a classroom in a school for poor children established in London in the late 1870s. Before the Elementary Education Acts of 1870 and 1880, which laid the groundwork for standardised, compulsory schooling, children were educated through a mixture of private and religiously affiliated schools.[1] State support came slowly. Parliamentary grants to so-called voluntary schools—elementary schools established by religious or philanthropic organisations—were first dispensed in 1833. However, the purpose of these funds was to supplement 'private subscriptions for the erection of school houses for the education of the children of the poorer classes in Great Britain'.[2]

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[1] For some time, the Education Acts of 1870 and 1880 have been seen as crucial turning points in the provision of mass education. This was a view first espoused in the nineteenth century. See Rowland Hamilton, 'Popular Education in England and Wales Before and After the Elementary Education Act of 1870', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 46.2 (1883), 283-349. It was the reigning view in the twentieth century as well. See Nigel Middleton, 'The Education Act of 1870 as the start of the modern concept of the child', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 18.2 (1970), 166-179, and W. H. G. Armytage, 'The 1870 Education Act', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 18.2 (1970), 121-133. Recent work suggests that early twentieth-century legislation may have been more significant. See David Mitch, 'The elementary education act of 1870: Landmark or transition?', in *School Acts and the Rise of Mass Schooling*, ed. by Johannes Westberg, Lukas Boser, and Ingrid Brühwiler (Cham: Palgrave, 2019), pp. 301-324.

[2] Alfred E. Ikin, *Organization and Administration of the Education Department* (London: Pitman & Sons, 1926), 4.

Two of the earliest recipients of government funding, the London-based Anglican National Society (NS) and the Dissenting British and Foreign School Society (BFSS), established Britain's first teacher-training colleges.

Funding in subsequent years, through 1861, was available to schools on an *ad hoc* basis. During this period, schools were eligible for grants to partially meet a variety of needs. To maintain accountability for public funds, a school inspectorate was established in 1837 to gather information on pedagogical techniques and educational outcomes. Beginning in 1862, block grants were awarded to schools based on student performance in annual examinations—facilitated by Her Majesty's inspectors of schools—covering arithmetic, reading, and writing. This system was known as 'Payment by Results'.[3]

The 1870 Act altered the educational landscape and the funding structures that supported it. The legislation called for the establishment of board schools in local authority districts. These were placed under the supervision of school boards that were in turn accountable to electors. Board schools laid the groundwork for universal primary instruction, which would be increasingly realised in the 1880s and 1890s. Because children needing to be accommodated outnumbered spaces in board schools, a range of different institutions to educate the poorer classes—funded by or through a combination of government subsidies, modest fees, or charitable contributions—persisted into the early twentieth century.

The wealthy, it was believed, could finance their own education. The sons of middle- and upper-class families often were tutored at home or at small schools run by local clergymen, or they attended public or grammar schools. The latter, stressing science, literature, and classical subjects, offered a rigorous academic curriculum, while the former were fee-based private schools that principally focused on character development. Indeed, instruction at public schools was above all 'religious and moral'. In the estimation of Thomas Arnold, longtime headmaster of Rugby School, inculcating these principles was of primary importance. Second in importance was 'gentlemanly conduct', with 'intellectual ability' third in order of priority.[4] Intellectual ability was honed through rigorous study of the classics, which, it was thought, provided the most appropriate foundation for pupils to undertake study at the ancient universities and assume positions of power or influence later in life.

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[3] Brendan A. Rapple, 'Payment by Results (1862-1897): Ensuring a Good Return on Governmental Expenditure', *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET) / Revue de la Pensée Éducative* 25.3 (1991): 183-201.

[4] Quoted in Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, D. D.*, Volume 1 (London: John Murray, 1875), p. 100.

The daughters of middle- and upper-class families were, for much of the century, educated at home, under the supervision of governesses, or at boarding schools. Curricula for these relatively privileged girls stressed the acquisition of languages, music, domestic skills, and social graces. Towards the latter half of the century, academically oriented secondary schools were established for girls. Although full university membership at Oxford and Cambridge was not available to young women until the early 1900s, they could attend classes and, increasingly, obtain degrees during this period. Emily Davis and Barbara Bodichon established Girton College (initially, the College for Women at Benslow House) at the University of Cambridge in 1869. Henry Sidgwick followed with Newnham College in 1871. By the end of that decade, two colleges for women at Oxford University, Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville Hall, had been founded.[5]

Aside from gender, access to a university education was greatly limited by social class. In the closing decades of the century, new institutions of higher education—from Newcastle and Leeds in the early 1870s to Nottingham and Liverpool in the 1880s—were founded to meet regional needs. With their greater focus on preparing a skilled managerial workforce, these universities were ostensibly more accessible than the ancient universities.[6] However, tuition, even if comparatively less expensive than Cambridge and Oxford, and in many cases inadequate educational preparation remained barriers for the lower middle and working classes.

For these populations, options for elementary and secondary education, until the advent of board schools, consisted of various types of charity schools. The majority of these institutions—funded through voluntary subscription and private benefaction—were first established in the eighteenth century as part of a widespread effort to provide poor, but not pauper, children with a basic education premised on Christian principles.[7] In addition to teaching pupils to say their catechism, charity schools, which educated boys and girls, equipped them with an understanding of simple arithmetic, spelling, and writing before apprenticing them to trades or arranging for them to enter domestic service.

Other types of charitable educational institutions included industrial schools and reformatory schools. Industrial schools focused on providing students with vocational training—reducing the possibility of workhouse

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[5] See Gemma Bailey, ed., *Lady Margaret Hall* (Oxford, 1923) and Alice Gardner, *A Short History of Newnham College* (Cambridge: Newnham College, 1921).

[6] Michael Sanderson, *The Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1975).

[7] M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement: A Study of Eighteenth Century Puritanism in Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938).

dependency, which was seen as pernicious to both the individual and society—and moral instruction. Industrial schools were conceived as 'preventative institutions' that would teach children who were 'in danger, from whatever cause, of falling into crime against man's laws' but, at the time of their enrolment, still 'innocent, or nearly so'.[8] While industrial schools aimed to instil religious values in pupils from the start of their education, reformatory schools, often run by various denominations, sought to offer pathways out of crime. Reformatory schools 'occupy a middle ground between educational and penal establishments'.[9] By offering religious and industrial training as well instruction in basic literacy and numeracy, reformatory schools positioned themselves as an alternative to prisons for juvenile offenders.

Beginning in the 1840s, ragged schools—so named because the children who attended often wore tattered clothing—were established in urban industrialised areas. As charity schools, they targeted a population that was often excluded from any other educational opportunity:

> the children of costermongers, who sell in the streets and at stalls fruit, vegetables; [. . .] the children of brickmakers, a large class about Notting-hill, and elsewhere; of pig-feeders, persons earning a good deal of money, but altogether careless about the education of their children; the children of rag-dealers and Spitalfields weavers out of employment, and many others of uncertain occupations, who are in a dreadful state during the winter months[;] [. . .] the children of labourers, who are out of work in frost or bad weather, or who are thrown out of work at the docks frequently by ships not arriving; the children of knackers and cats'-meat men; of slop-tailors, who form a large number, who earn a bare subsistence, and who yet will not condescend to accept parochial relief; the children of washerwomen who go out to work in the day time, neglecting their children; the children of crossing-sweepers and street musicians, and the lowest mendicants and tramps, and persons who get their living by theft, who altogether neglect their children; the children of hawkers, pigeon-dealers, dog-fanciers, and other men of that class. A great portion of our children are those of worthless and drunken parents, and many others are

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[8] Robert Spence Watson, *Industrial Schools* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1867), p. 3
[9] Mary Carpenter, *Reformatory Schools: for the Children of the Perishing and Dangerous Classes and for Juvenile Offenders* (London: Gilpin, 1851), p. vi.

the children of parents, who, from their poverty, are too poor to pay even a penny a week for schooling.[10]

Even Sunday schools, out of which the ragged school movement grew, turned away many of the poorest children on behavioural grounds or out of social prejudices.[11] According to Mary Florence (Baring) Compton, titled the Countess Compton in 1893, when she published a paper on work in the ragged schools, order, cleanliness, and discipline were 'foreign' notions to the first generation of ragged school children. 'They thronged into the new schools with the purpose of having a bit of fun by upsetting everything', she writes in a retrospective account of women's work at the institutions. 'They blew out the candles', she continues, 'flung over the forms, let birds and mice loose in the room in order to create an uproar among the scholars and shake the nerves of the teachers'.[12]

Spreading widely throughout the United Kingdom from the late eighteenth century onward, Sunday schools brought together religious evangelicals and philanthropists who saw a pressing need for the children of the poor to be provided religious and rudimentary educational instruction.[13] While ragged schools incorporated religious instruction, and many offered Sunday services, they aimed to provide—in contrast to industrial schools' focus on vocational training—a general education that destitute children could receive in no other setting.

Although the options for primary, secondary, and higher education varied, the form of instruction was remarkably consistent. Nineteenth-century teaching methods stressed rote learning, with students expected to memorise facts and figures. The culture of examinations took shape in the eighteenth through early

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[10] 'Testimony of William Locke, Select Committee on the Education of Destitute Children. Minutes of Evidence' in *Charity and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Vol 3: Networks and Collaborations, ed. by Kevin A. Morrison (London: Routledge, 2025), pp. 59-104 (p. 60).

[11] J. Reid Howatt, 'Then and Now: A Sketch of 50 Years' Work of the Ragged School Union' in *Charity and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Vol 1: The Spur of Religion, ed. by Kevin A. Morrison (London: Routledge, 2025), pp. 105-115.

[12] Countess Compton, 'Woman's Work in the Ragged Schools', in *Charity and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Vol 4: Philanthropy, Charity, and Social Activism, ed. by Kevin A. Morrison (London: Routledge), pp. 370-375 (p. 371).

[13] Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

nineteenth centuries at Oxford and Cambridge.[14] The focus on examinations extended downward to secondary and primary schools for middle- and upper-class children. As the practice of cramming spread, so too did debates about its educational efficacy. Surveying the state of British education in an 1832 anonymously published essay in the *Monthly Repository*, John Stuart Mill laments that '[m]odern education is all *cram*'. He specifies: 'Latin cram, mathematical cram, literary cram, political cram, theological cram, moral cram'. Assuming it 'already knows everything', the world 'has only to tell it to its children, who, on their part, have only to hear, and lay it to rote (not to *heart*)'.[15] Imaginative literature offered compelling fictional accounts of the psychological and physical effects of cramming. In *Dombey and Son* (1848), Charles Dickens depicts the toll cramming takes on the pupils of affluent families at Dr. Blimber's Academy, located in the fashionable seaside town of Brighton. Nonfiction, including biography and autobiography, were sites of critique as well. As late as 1870, Anna Lloyd, an early student at Girton College, was objecting to 'being crammed like a Dorking fowl', as documented in her memoir.[16]

Even while formal educational opportunities were made increasingly available to children of working-class families, the emphasis on rote forms of instruction across schools and social classes remained firmly intact. Educational reformists differed in their assessments of this instructional approach. Thomas Arnold pioneered a variety of educational reforms at the elite Rugby School from the late 1820s through 1841. These included, among others, instituting a pedagogical hierarchy of discipline and subservience. His prefect system cast older pupils as moral and academic exemplars for younger ones. Arnold also launched an expanded curriculum including mathematics, modern languages, and history alongside the classics. However, he continued to assume that rote learning of Greek and Latin was essential.[17]

Other reformists contended that, as a pedagogical technique, rote learning greatly diminished the mind's capacity to synthesise, reason, or invent. As state funding in England and Wales became increasingly tied to student outcomes on

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[14] Christopher Stray, 'From Oral to Written Examinations: Cambridge, Oxford and Dublin 1700–1914', in *History of Universities*, Vol. 20.2, ed. Mordechai Feingold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 76-130.

[15] John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. 1: Autobiography and Literary Essays, ed. by J. M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 329-339 (p. 337).

[16] Anna Lloyd, *A Memoir*, ed. by Edith M. Lloyd (London: Cayme, 1928), p. 63.

[17] Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (London: Nelson & Sons, 1861).

annual examinations conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectors, however, the use of rote learning as an instructional method—even in the face of significant criticism—became more entrenched. Appointed in 1851 as a school inspector, Matthew Arnold, a son of Thomas Arnold, viewed the annual examinations as a 'mechanical contrivance' that allowed students to pass even if they did not know how to write or read, let alone reason. The instructor, in teaching to the test, 'tries to cram his pupils with details enough to enable him to say, when they produce them, that they have fulfilled the test requirements'.[18] In his report to the Education Department in 1884, the psychiatrist James Chrichton-Browne criticised the English educational system and cautioned against the government's continued efforts to provide universal access. One set of educational standards failed to account for the significant disparities among children of differing physical and mental abilities. Moreover, he argued, 'the evils of brain forcing are most likely to show themselves under a system of "cram" or spurt teaching, with a view to a specific examination, or of learning by rote and rule'.[19]

James Phillips Kay (later James Kay-Shuttleworth), another educational reformer, criticised the regimented rote learning of the monitorial process in which older students drilled younger pupils on facts and figures. This system—perceived by supporters as a cost-effective way of educating large numbers of poor children—was, he declared, 'humbug'.[20] In 1841, as part of the first wave of professionalisation, he established a training college for schoolteachers of the poor at his home in Battersea. Five years later, he introduced the pupil-teacher system. Unlike the monitorial system, this model—adapted from continental Europe—relied on pupils who were apprenticed to be teachers. Both innovations, along with forms of instruction that focused on children's own experiences with subject matter, were designed to improve the quality of teaching across the country.[21]

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[18] Matthew Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools, 1852-1882*, ed. by Francis Sandford (London: Macmillan & Co., 1889), p. 140.

[19] James Chrichton-Browne, 'Brain-forcing', in *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts, 1830–1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 338–340 (p. 338). See also Sheila Cordner, *Education in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Exclusion as Innovation* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[20] H. C. Barnard, *A Short History of English Education from 1760–1944* (London: University of London Press, 1947), p. 122.

[21] See James Kay-Shuttleworth*, Four Periods of Public Education* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862).

One of Kay-Shuttleworth's innovations was the object lesson. An early form of experiential learning, the object lesson emphasised hands-on instruction with objects. In *Lessons on Objects* (1830), which was widely read on both sides of the Atlantic, Elizabeth Mayo argues that students learn best when their 'mental powers' are stimulated 'to activity'.[22] Objects could serve this purpose. Whereas the rote instructional approach kept minds 'almost passive', with pupils developing 'a habit of receiving impressions from others', object-based learning allowed students to gain 'mental power by the exertion of their own faculties'.[23] There are, of course, clear parallels between Victorian object lessons, which placed student observations and experiences at the forefront of the educational experience, and twentieth- and twenty-first-century experiential learning. At the same time, Andrea Korda cautions that the Victorian object lesson could be 'used to objectify and dehumanise others who were not invited to share in the dominant viewpoint as equals', and contemporary forms of experiential learning need to keep in mind that 'a lack of knowledge or awareness of the histories of colonialism and dehumanization' may impact students' 'abilities to come to terms with these difficult histories' today.[24]

For different reasons, Dickens had his doubts about the object lesson. While the professionalisation of teaching ensured that instructors received some level of training and better pay, classrooms, he worried, remained too focused on factual knowledge at the expense of creative learning. In *Hard Times* (1854), published six years after *Dombey and Son*, Dickens critiques model schools of the sort that Kay-Shuttleworth had established. These facilities for teacher training were supposed to reflect best practices in education. Yet, in Dickens's depiction of the outcome of the object lesson, a horse is lost in a sea of factual, but essentially meaningless, detail:

> Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely, twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy

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[22] Elizabeth Mayo, *Lessons on Objects*, 6th ed. (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1837), p. 3. In the United States, the schoolteacher John Frost edited a version of Mayo's text and published it under the title *Lessons on Common Things*.

[23] Mayo, *Lessons on Objects*, pp. 3-4.

[24] Andrea Korda, 'Experiential Learning in the Victorian Classroom: What Can We Learn from the Object Lesson?' in *Victorian Culture and Experiential Learning: Historical Encounters in the Classroom*, ed. by Kevin A. Morrison (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), pp. 19-32 (p. 30).

countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.[25]

While the school board superintendent Thomas Gradgrind elicits this response from one of the model schools' pupils, the teacher Mr. M'Choakumchild is responsible—as his surname suggests—for having a stifling effect on student learning. The teacher 'knew all about all the Water Sheds of all the world (whatever they are), and all the histories of all the peoples, and all the names of all the rivers and mountains, and all the productions, manners, and customs of all the countries, and all their boundaries and bearings on the two and thirty points of the compass'. Dickens then wittily declares: 'If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more!'[26] In Dickens's view, some educational experiments were as deadening as the forms of instruction they sought to replace.

If the object lesson focused on the accumulation of incremental knowledge through sensory examination and classification, another approach, active learning, stressed student involvement in the educational enterprise. By mid-century, some school inspectors were advising teachers to utilise techniques such as problem-solving, discussion, and thinking to engage students in their learning. 'A good teacher will habitually leave something purposely unsaid, and lead his scholars to infer it from what has gone before', one school inspector wrote in his annual report for 1853-54. 'It is not the teacher's duty to do everything for the children', the inspector added, 'but to lead them to do all they can for themselves'.[27] Countering methods of rote instruction, an increasing number of inspectors were encouraging schoolteachers to employ a variety of interactive methods.[28]

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[25] Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (London: Dent, 1907), p. 22.

[26] Ibid., p. 7.

[27] 'Union School Reports', *The English Journal of Education* Vol. 8 New Series (London: George Bell, 1854), pp. 409-416 (p. 414).

[28] Thus, current strategies of active learning, increasingly prominent since the 1990s, have their roots in the nineteenth century. The concept, which asks students to apply knowledge acquired in the classroom to specific activities assigned by the instructor, was popularised through the pioneering work of Charles C. Bonwell and James A. Eison, *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom* (Washington, D. C.: George Washington University, 1991). For a few recent examples of projects in classrooms on the Victorian era that take this approach, see Klaudia Hiu Yen Lee, 'Bridging the Distance: Learning Victorian Literature Through Creative Projects', in Morrison, *Victorian Culture and Experiential Learning*, pp. 35-48, and Janice Schroeder, Barbara Leckie, and Jenna M. Herdman, 'Working with Mayhew: Collaboration and Historical Empathy in Precarious Times', in Morrison, *Victorian Culture and Experiential Learning*, pp. 49-64; and Leslee

In the nineteenth century, ragged schools were sites of neither active nor experiential learning. Dickens, who had himself visited ragged schools in 1846 on behalf of the heiress and philanthropist Angela Burdett Coutts, harboured an unrealised ambition to open a model ragged school, which would employ strikingly different educational methods to those he witnessed and depicted in his novels. In *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), the 'oppressive and disagreeable' ragged school where young Charley Hexam is initially a pupil is 'crowded, noisy, and confusing', with some students falling asleep from the 'monotonous droning noise' emanating from others reciting from their spelling books.[29] Dickens thus supported the ragged school movement even as he criticised their forms of instruction.

Dickens's death in 1870 coincided with the passage of the Elementary Education Act. Many ragged schools immediately transitioned into boarding schools. Others continued to operate until almost all British children received some form of state-funded primary school education. Established by Thomas Barnardo in 1877, during these decades of transition, the Copperfield Road Ragged School—comprising three former warehouses on the towpath of Regent's Canal and located next to Mile End Park in what is now the London Borough of Tower Hamlets—was the largest of its kind in London. As with the nearly 250 other ragged schools in the metropolis, it provided a rudimentary education, including arithmetic, spelling, and writing, free of charge to the poorest children in its immediate vicinity. At the time of its closure in 1908, Barnardo's Ragged School had educated tens of thousands of children in the East End.

Today, this former educational facility is now the Ragged School Museum, which opened in 1990. A painstakingly reconstructed Victorian-era classroom on one of the museum's upper floors enables visitors to glimpse the institution as pupils would have experienced it in the first year of the school's operations (Fig. 3). As part of its community outreach efforts, the Ragged School Museum also offers a prearranged Victorian classroom experience. Taught by an actor in costume who assumes the role of Miss Perkins, the half-hour lesson on reading, writing, and arithmetic is principally designed for students who are following the national curriculum in key stages 1 and 2 (ages 5-11). But adaptations for other groups are possible.

Thorne-Murphy, 'Experiential Learning and the Value of Novice Scholars: Victorian Short Fiction and the Periodical Market', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 57.3 (2024): 323-347.
[29] Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), p. 202.

For nearly a decade, while teaching summer study abroad courses in London on nineteenth-century urban cultures for an American university, I arranged for my students to visit the Ragged School Museum. As I have explored more fully elsewhere, experiential modes of learning, including field trips and study abroad programmes, have the potential, however tenuously, to bring the past alive for students and increase their historical empathy.[30] The classroom with Miss Perkins reflects the turn—beginning in the 1960s—toward 'living history'.[31] One may be critical of experiential modes that share the underlying premises of affective (or living) history—'conjectural interpretations of the past, the collapsing of temporalities and an emphasis on affect, individual experience and daily life rather than historical events, structures and processes'[32]—while recognising that the (historical) insights they engender simply cannot be gleaned by textual analysis of sources alone.[33] An approach that immerses students in historical interpretation through hands-on, experiential participation, living history is one of the many pedagogical techniques that link past and present.[34]

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[30] Kevin A. Morrison, *Study Abroad Pedagogy, Dark Tourism, and Historical Reenactment: In the Footsteps of Jack the Ripper and His Victims* (Cham: Palgrave, 2019). See also Peter Katz and Sarah Tanner, 'Mapping Feeling: Geography, Affect, and History on the London Streets through Study Abroad', in Morrison, *Victorian Culture and Experiential Learning*, pp. 143-60.

[31] See Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 193.

[32] Vanessa Agnew, 'History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and its Work in the Present', *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 11.3 (2007), 299-312 (p. 299).

[33] For example, Alexander Cook sees value in the 'visceral, emotional engagement with the past' that forms of historical re-enactment engender, which may, he contends, 'invite participants and audiences to take seriously the challenge of considering historical actors as human beings rather than as incidental by-products of material conditions, the bearers of some abstract historical spirit, or as passive vehicles for self-articulation of discourse'. See his 'The Use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment: Thoughts on Recent Trends in Public History', *Criticism* 46.3 (2004): 487–496, p. 491.

[34] For other examples of experiential learning in courses on the Victorian era that stress embodied practices, see, among others, Jen Cadwallader, 'Adventures in Living Like a Victorian', in *Teaching Victorian Literature in the Twenty-First Century: A Guide to Pedagogy*, ed. by Jen Cadwallader and Lawrence W. Mazzeno (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 261-74; Helana E. Brigman, 'Cooking the Victorian Recipe: An Experiential Approach to Cookbooks in Victorian Studies', in Morrison, *Victorian Culture and Experiential Learning*, pp. 65-84; and Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and John Plunkett, 'Play, Craft, Design, Feel: Engaging Students and the Public with Victorian Culture', in Morrison, *Victorian Culture and Experiential Learning*, pp. 101-20.

(Fig. 3. The Victorian classroom, Ragged School Museum. © Kevin A. Morrison. Courtesy of Shendrew Balendran.)

So too does this issue of *Victorian Network*, which brings together three essays that explore both pedagogical practices in the Victorian period and educational approaches by which contemporary students can apprehend the past. In 'Death of the Essay? Generative AI, Literature Teachers' Five Stages of Grief, and Alternative Assignment Design in Victorian Studies', Kimberly Cox, Riya Das, Shannon Draucker, Ashley Nadeau, Kate Nesbit, and Doreen Thierauf begin by taking another set of affects seriously: the 'shock, anger, denial, dejection, and bargaining that inflect the discourse on how this technology impacts literature and composition teachers' work'. Contextualising the introduction of generative AI within the larger framework of the neoliberal university, and in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), the authors 'think through the end of the standard academic essay, as it has been historically conceived and produced, in literature classrooms and . . . speculate on what lies beyond'.

Whereas Cox et al. consider our current moment of transition from one form of assessment to a variety of new possibilities, Ksenia Podvoiskaia, in her essay 'Re-inventing the Schoolmaster: Teacher Training in Early 19th-century London', examines another period of 'major transformation' in the history of pedagogy. Between 1810 and 1840, pedagogical training and the

professionalisation of teachers assumed more modern—and, indeed, more imperial—forms. The schoolmaster evolved, Podvoiskaia argues, from 'an individual whose professional career was tied to a personal reputation to an accredited, trained professional' representing broader organisations with imperial ambitions. Focusing on the aforementioned National Society (NS) and the Dissenting British and Foreign School Society (BFSS), both of which employed the monitorial system, Podvoiskaia shows how these private organisations, utilising teachers as the vehicles for maintaining and extending a religiously inflected national and imperial education, laid the groundwork for state-led developments following the 1870 Education Act.

Although moralism was a fundamental principal of the ragged school classroom I described at the beginning of this introduction, many instructors today would disavow moralistic instruction by insisting that one's 'own moral claims' are 'something other than moral claims'. Yet, Jacob Romanow suggests in 'The Moralist Critic and the Student Activist: A Reconsideration', 'disciplinary denialism about the moralism of our own political and aesthetic judgment' can lead to 'reactionary framings' of student activism as 'cancel culture' rather than seeing such activism 'as part of ongoing processes of canon formation'. Excavating the links among nineteenth-century critics, contemporary Victorianists, and cultural activists, Romanow argues that 'acknowledging the moralism of presiding forms of scholarly inquiry' can go some way toward bridging the gap between inquiry and activism that only 'benefits right-wing attacks on higher education and on leftist activism' more generally.

In the last decade, the topic of Victorian pedagogy has gained increased prominence. Any number of books now consider both the instructional practices that dominated Victorian classrooms and the techniques utilised by instructors today to teach the literary and cultural productions of the Victorian era. This issue concludes with reviews of books published in the last decade that have contributed to this vital reassessment.

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