

*Shapes and Spaces:
Inside Joseph Lancaster's
Monitorial "Laboratory"*

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In this article I examine the nature of discipline in the monitorial school. Recognizing that much post-*Discipline and Punish* research has concentrated on contemporary educational institutions, I return to Lancaster's original school model not simply to identify the presence of discipline, but to describe its function. In other words I define what discipline *is*. Particular attention is paid to the architecture of the school, showing how the design of the school room operates to discipline and place the pupil. I also examine in detail two engravings that appear in Lancaster's treatise, *The British System of Education* (1810) in order to suggest that an identifiable anxiety underlies his ostensible confidence in the monitorial system. Finally, I look at the influence which the British monitorial school had on its North American counterpart and advance theories for the system's failure.

Dans cet article j'examine la nature de la discipline dans l'école monitoriale. En reconnaissant que la recherche faisant suite à *Discipline and Punish* s'est concentrée sur les institutions éducatives contemporaines, je retourne au modèle scolaire original de Lancaster, non seulement pour identifier la présence de la discipline, mais aussi pour décrire sa fonction. En d'autres mots, je définis ce que c'est. Je consacre une attention particulière à l'architecture de l'école, montrant comment le design de la salle de classe opère pour discipliner et placer l'élève. J'examine également en détail deux principes fondamentaux qui apparaissent dans le traité de Lancaster, *The British System of Education* (1810) de manière à suggérer qu'une anxiété perceptible se cache sous sa confiance ostentatoire dans le système monitorial. Je regarde aussi l'influence que l'école monitoriale britannique a eu sur sa contrepartie nord-américaine et propose des théories quant à l'échec du système.

"The notion, indeed, of most parents is, I believe, that children cannot be too much under the master's eye" (Bentham, 1995).

The Critical Context

The applicability to educational institutions of Michel Foucault's work on the nature of discipline has not gone unremarked. I speak here not about discipline conceived as a way by which an external power imposes itself on an already defined and constituted subject. Rather, I speak of it as being a vital component of the process of subjection, that which is essential if power is to become productive, to form the subject that will be subjected. Judith Butler sees "subjection [as], literally, the making of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced" (1997, p. 84). As Foucault argues, "it is not necessary to use force to constrain the convict to good behaviour ... the schoolboy to application" (1979, p. 202). Given the proper environment, the institutional inhabitant becomes both disciplinarian and disciplined. The end result of these conditions in which "he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (p. 203) constitute what I am arguing is the limit-case of a specific variety of discipline: self-discipline.

The majority of post *Discipline and Punish* research has been concerned to confirm or repudiate Foucault's theories by reference to current educational institutions, although it is the 19th-century mutual instruction, or monitorial school, to which Foucault directs our attention. This was a school where a vast number of pupils would be educated by a single master, aided by a cadre of assistants – known as monitors – who were themselves pupils. Joseph Lancaster (1810) who, with the Reverend Andrew Bell, laid claim in England to the invention of the monitorial system confirms the size of these institutions when he writes in the preface to *The British System of Education*, "two young men lately established schools for a thousand children each, and a lad of seventeen did the same the year before" (1810, p. xviii). There are ample criticisms that record the schools' inability to live up to their apologists' expectations. Bruce Curtis writes:

Groups of as large as six hundred students were instructed by one teacher with the aid of student assistants or 'monitors.' Only very rudimentary instruction was offered, and that by rote. The system failed miserably, on the whole, and was consistently criticized by a variety of educational writers for its inability to *form the selves of students*. (1988, p. 300)

Curtis, perhaps inadvertently, identifies both the fundamental aim and the ultimate failure of monitorialism. Its ostensible purpose may have been the provision of education for the disadvantaged, but in reality it was the (re)-formation, regimentation, and disciplining of character, the creation of what Foucault (1979) has identified in *Discipline and Punish* as a "docile subject" – in this case an obedient, politically useful, ideal citizen – with which it was concerned. An apparent reluctance to examine both the ways in which monitorial schools worked to create a political subject, and to scrutinize monitorial tracts and pamphlets to a close reading typifies much of the published work that deals with discipline and the school. Stephen Ball, for example, writes in the introduction to *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge* (1990), "schools, like prisons and asylums, are fundamentally concerned with moral and social regulation" (p. i). While the origins of contemporary educational discipline lie in the monitorial school, Ball applies a Foucauldian informed analysis to schools of the late 20th century at the expense of a searching investigation of the 18th and 19th-century monitorial school in which – no less than the prison, the factory, and the military – disciplinary techniques were being perfected in an attempt to produce a docile, predictable, and politically useful subject.

That is not to say that the early monitorial architects have been totally rejected for examination. David Hogan, while recognizing that Lancaster's system was one of "continuous surveillance and impersonal authority" (1989, p. 3), goes on to argue that they were also models of a growing bourgeois competitiveness constituting what he describes as an *embourgeoisement*. He recognizes that Lancaster "developed a detailed plan of the spatial organization of the school," and that "he transformed discipline into a complex structure of minute and diffuse micropractices of rules, duties,

requirements, punishments and commands" (1989 pp. 410-411). These are important facets of the monitorial institution, and I expand upon Hogan's description when I show in this paper *how* the "spatial organization" is itself an intricate and indispensable component of the monitorial disciplinary regime.

In this connection Thomas Markus's work further informs and enables my own analyses. For Markus, the function of spatial organization is inseparable from the power relationships that develop within the school. He writes, "space was organized *to produce relations between individual children ... [and that] the school in fact became in microcosm a model of the class structure of the new industrial and social system*" [italics added] (1996, p. 9). Having argued that "educational historians have sought their evidence for ideology in educational literature ... *the most concrete evidence is material*, and this has been left out of the analysis" [italics added] (p. 12), he goes on to state that "the ... invention of monitorial teaching ... is the crucial case for demonstrating *the use of space as an ideological instrument*" [italics added] (p. 33). Markus's architectural observations are fascinating, and much of what follows in my analysis of the monitorial schoolroom draws on his ideas of the disciplining of the material pedagogical space.

It is not surprising, given that the monitorial system's initial successes and subsequent failures occurred in England, that most commentary on these institutions concentrates on English schools. However, at the very time that the system was proving itself inadequate in England, its diehard supporters were bringing the doctrine of monitorialism to America and Upper and Lower Canada. As George W. Spragge observed 60 years ago, the American Thaddeus Osgood "intended to establish schools 'on the basis of the most improved modes of Education, as practised in England'" (1937, p. 32). In 1814, Osgood opened the colony's first monitorial school in Quebec. Mirroring the enthusiasm that the schools had enjoyed in England, monitorial institutions were established in increasing numbers: "By 1827 there were over thirty Madras schools in [New Brunswick] with an enrolment of approximately 1200 pupils" (Wilson, Stamp & Audet, 1970, p. 109). However, the initial successes experienced in Lower Canada were themselves relatively temporary. Although some monitorial schools still operated there "as

late as 1871" (p. 109), it seems clear that these were isolated examples and that the system was no less doomed to failure when transplanted as it had been in its country of origin. Elsewhere the experience was similar, although in some cases the schools' demise was more rapid. The Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada in 1818, Sir Peregrine Maitland, was a firm supporter of the monitorial system. However, his "plan to open [monitorial schools] in every town of Upper Canada ... proved a singular failure" (pp. 204-205).

The well-documented rigidity of monitorial routine leads in some cases to a misunderstanding of the architectural nature of the school. Astutely identifying a smaller and less densely distributed population as one of the causes of the system's failure in Upper Canada, educational historians Susan Houston and Alison Prentice write: "In addition, of course, the *large-scale barracks-style* schools typical of such experiments in popular education were quite unnecessary to the task at hand, given the modest size of even the fastest-growing colonial towns" [*italics added*] (1988, pp. 39-40). The necessity of a large population in order to achieve economies of scale is a pertinent point. However, the impression that the monitorial school resembles a military "barracks" is misleading. It deflects us from an understanding of the essential difference between discipline understood as an externally imposed force – a common pre-Foucault and (alas) widespread current perception – and self-discipline – by means of which a person becomes the very agent of his or her own transformation into a predictable subject. It was this latter mode of discipline (with which this essay is primarily concerned) upon which the monitorial school was in large part predicated. Bruce Curtis has drawn attention to what he sees as the connection between "Inspectorial practice" and government (1992, p. 11), and quotes from Foucault's (1979) *Discipline and Punish* to emphasize the existence of "panoptic modes of power" (Curtis, 1992, p. 11). What Curtis does not explicate, however, is the essential element of panopticism which is its ability to make discipline productive not by constant observation, but rather by the *certainty of the potential* for constant observation. The student, the prisoner, the factory operative, produces in accordance with set norms because he never knows for sure when the eye of the observer is on him. Thus he produces in expectation of discovery. It is this certainty, and one's subsequent

conforming behavior, that results in the disciplined person, the *self-disciplined* individual.

Foucault, it should be said, does not speak at length on discipline in the pedagogic space. Why subsequent commentators have largely ignored this opportunity is something of a mystery given the challenge that his work provides. As he asserts when writing on the relevance of an understanding of the past to our analysis of the present:

What's effectively needed is a ramified, penetrative perception of the present, one that makes it possible to locate lines of weakness, strong points, positions where the instances of power have secured and implanted themselves by a system of organization dating back over 150 years. (1980, p. 62)

Which is to confirm of course that it is vital to ascertain our current situation if we are to appreciate its ancestry, its genealogy, just as we must fully understand our past if we are to observe its successors accurately. And yet we cannot, I would argue, determine our location, perceive the present in other words, by a reductive application of what was pertinent in one 19th-century field to another in the 20th century. If Foucault's theories of discipline have any relevance to contemporary pedagogy and its institutions, those theories must be tested against the evidence contained in the 19th-century educational literature that has survived. It is my purpose in this article to examine the disciplinary nature peculiar to Lancaster's monitorial school and some of the techniques that prevailed within it. This, not with the intent to prove the relevance of Foucault's theories of discipline to another field so much as to establish an alternative way of looking at the monitorial school, to provide a criticism deeper than commenting on the inadequacy of rote-learning which the critics who have studied these schools seem largely unable to go beyond. I argue that the monitorial school at least in England – operated as a laboratory in which the experimental material, its pupils, were subjected to a variety of treatments that were motivated by a need for social containment more than by a desire to improve their intellects. I concentrate, then, in this paper's first section, on aspects of authority and control simply because these were the foundations of the monitorial system

in England. To this extent it is arguable that the purpose of the system differed in its English and North American applications. I follow my analysis of the Lancasterian school room and its representation with a comparison of some salient points concerning North American and English monitorialism. I draw attention to what I argue are geo-political causes of the system's failure – differences in population distribution and class structure, and some similarities between England's disadvantaged and America's indigenous peoples. I conclude by showing that, paradoxically, the monitorial system contributed to modern pedagogical thought by its very failure, and that its shortcomings serve as a continual warning against neo-conservative notions of a more utilitarian educational system.

Monitorial Nature

Carl F. Kaestle has remarked: "The monitorial system is an example *par excellence* of early nineteenth-century educators' faith in a *science of education*" [italics added] (1973, p. 46). To be sure, one of the basic disciplinary reference points is the Panoptic principle about which Foucault says: "The Panopticon was ... a laboratory" (1979, p. 203). And yet, what may be seen as an increasingly scientifically influenced vocabulary that exerts itself in educational material of the time nevertheless owes much to the influences of Biblical and devotional writings. "The rhetoric of gardens, agriculture and nature [that] pervaded educational literature" (Markus, 1993, p. 47), is not exclusively scientific. "Samuel Wilderspin, whose early efforts were instrumental in the development of infant schools, enlists an "old proverb – *bend the twig while it is young*" (1825, p. 10), in the early part of his treatise on infant education. The Marquess of Lansdowne, quoted by Wilderspin, speaking of the influences on young children remarks "that where the seeds of vice might be sown, there might be introduced the *seeds of good*" [italics added] (1825, p. 19). And "another Wilderspin disciple, William Wilson ... saw the infant school as a Parish institution, one of whose objects was to eliminate troublesome children ('removing many a *noxious weed*')" [italics added] (Markus, 1993, p. 74). The influence of a natural discourse also permeates educational theory and institutions at a much deeper

level. The spatial maps of educational facilities reproduced by Markus are remarkable for their similarity in appearance to cultivated canes and trees. This physical similarity is quite clearly coincidental, and yet it is surely not accidental that the structures themselves – the buildings, the facilities – reflect an awareness and an empathy for a natural design in which trunks, branches, and their derivatives fundamentally complement each other. Here in these institutions, boys, rather than plants, were trained and cultivated. That which had strayed, become wild, disorderly – the truant – had to be corrected. The boy must be re-formed, straightened, shaped, but he must be held in one place in order to impress on him the legitimacy of his incarceration, to establish him once again within the community; he must take root; he must racinate. Like a seedling then, “he is ... tied up to a post” (Lancaster, 1805, p. 114). On the one hand the punishment is an exhibition, a deterrent. On the other, it is a violent re-forming, a straightening of an aberrant nature. Interestingly, those boys who repeat the offence are “tied up in ... blanket[s] and left to sleep at night on the floor, in the school house” (Lancaster, 1805, p. 114). Here, it seems, in the dark, under wrapping, isolated both from influence, and the opportunity to influence, they will propagate to advantage, their docility restored. And just as a diseased plant or species is kept separate from healthy specimens in order to prevent the spread of disease, so too the habitual truant is kept in isolation, is quarantined to curtail contamination: “When boys are frequently in the habit of playing truant, we may conclude that they have formed some bad connections; and that nothing but keeping them apart can effect a reform” (Lancaster, 1805, p. 114). There is more than a hint of associationist psychology underlying this remedy. A view of the human mind that perceives it as a blank slate, also envisions future conduct as contingent solely upon external influences. The treatment handed out to offenders in this instance recognizes the associationist’s fear of infection arising from exposure to the less behaviourly correct. The “disciplinary space,” as Foucault reminds us, demands that it be divided to “eliminate ... the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals ... their unusable and dangerous coagulation” (1979, p. 143).

The separation, then, works at increasing levels of isolation. In the school, the children are initially separated from their society as much as possible in order to expose them to those habits that are to be inculcated by the whole student body. Once within the institution, a further subdivision occurs to remove the larger population from potential sources of harm. But those educational theorists who saw the danger of contamination by association perceived also its obverse. Moral and scholarly rectitude might be applied in larger quantities to exert an influence on those in the grip of less desirable habits: “an unruly and frivolous pupil should be placed between two who are well behaved and serious” (Foucault, 1979, p. 147). The necessity to quarantine the undesirable extends to reflect the social conditions out of which the pupils are drawn: “those whose parents are neglectful and verminous must be separated from those who are careful and clean” (p. 147). This approach enjoys a certain philosophical stamina. Sixteen years later, Robert Owen – who had instigated an experiment in education and social control at New Lanark – still argued: “The child will be removed, so far as is at present practicable, from the erroneous treatment of the yet untrained and untaught parents” (cited in Markus, 1993, p. 69). The longevity of the vision of an engineered social order is evident from Owen’s later pronouncement: “Children are, without exception, passively and wonderfully contrived compounds ... (they) may be formed collectively to have any human character” (p. 69). Little wonder then that he can also maintain, “the infants of any one class in the world may be readily formed into men of any other class” (p. 69). It is an observation that calls into relief the fractious relationship between an apparent philanthropy, a benevolence, and the motivations of the philanthropist, the benefactor. The institution figures as society in microcosm, as a well-ordered, distribution of individuals. And like the society of which it constitutes itself as a simulacrum, it uses the separation to observe, to study to record. “Discipline organizes an analytical space” (Foucault 1979, p. 143).

In his study of English school architecture, Malcolm Seaborne (1971) provides an illustration prepared by Hamel in 1818 of the interior of Joseph Lancaster’s Borough Road monitorial school (Figure 1). While Seaborne identifies functions and apparatus, he does not analyze the engraving in terms of power relationships. To

appreciate fully the dynamics at play in this room, we must see the actors, the room's contents not, as Seaborne's description suggests, as isolated, functional islands only loosely connected to each other. Rather we need to appreciate the ways in which the pupils and their overseers *inhabit* the school-room, perform various roles in it, recognize the complex relationships between human-being and paraphernalia. None of these are simply suspended satellites in an unordered space, an area that is defined only by the enclosure effected by the walls of the room. The master's platform – invisible in this engraving – is significant by virtue of its very invisibility. We view the room from behind the desk that we cannot see. The interior components – animated and stationary – are not randomly connected; and the significance of the school's architecture is not limited simply to what may be seen from the outside. That is to say, the notion of the school does not presuppose a particular type of construction identifiable by its exterior, whose social function is inseparable from an objective whose main concern is the gathering together of children for the purpose of offering them instruction. The internal dimensions and layout of the monitorial school were the subject of much meticulous design. Lancaster writes: "It is essential to leave aisles 5 feet wide on each side, so that the children, when not at their desks, can stand in semi-circles facing the side-walls, on which the lesson-boards should be hung (for this reason also the windows should not be too low)" (Lancaster, 1810, p. 1).

Lancaster's concern with the school's architecture is beyond dispute. "The building and arrangement of school-rooms, is of so much importance in the minute and accurate details, that I have thought it proper to publish a separate work on that subject" (1810, p. 3). If his preoccupation with detail reflects his widely documented anxiety with cost and efficiency, then it must be somewhere within this precise ordering, placing, and justification that the greater significance of the school's design lies.

Commenting on the function of buildings, Hillier and Hanson make the observation that, "buildings may be comparable to other artefacts in that they assemble elements into a physical object with a certain form; but they are incomparable in that they also create and order the empty volumes of space resulting from that object" (1984, p. 1). The purpose of ordering that space reaches into the very

social fabric of the people who are brought together within it. "The ordering of space in buildings is really about the ordering of social relations between people" (p. 2). Hence, the study of the monitorial school's architecture must necessarily go beyond a mere description of the artefacts that break up the space within the room. It must examine the geometry, both explicit and implicit, in an endeavor to determine the psychological influences on the pupils. It must follow the trajectories of observation in order to see how the relations between pupil and monitor, pupil and master, master and monitor, form themselves, maintain themselves, and become manifest in the daily behavior of the school.

Lancaster is explicit on the subject of school-room design: "The best form for a school-room is a long square, or parallelogram" (1810, p. 1). While this affords an apparently unrestricted arena over which the master may conduct his constant observation, the lack of obstruction also serves to order the relationship between the boys themselves. Concerning the function of ostensibly open areas in modern buildings, Thomas Markus writes: "An obvious effect of such a spatial device is that movement through spaces which appear to be open and free, is in fact highly constrained. This contradiction between space and form hides social control mechanisms" (Markus, 1996, p. 22). Thus, Lancaster designs the placement of furniture in order to control the movement of the pupils within a constrained space. The desks – they "should all be *single desks*" – must "front the head of the school" (1810, p. 1). All of the boys face the same direction – they sit with their faces towards the head of the school; conformity exerts itself even at this fundamental level of design. But, although Lancaster seems to exhibit a concern for the mutual right of the students to enjoy their own space, nevertheless that space is subject to a decided control and order. The amount of available room within which to move must not vary. Thus: "It is desirable the desks and forms should be substantial, and firmly fixed in the ground, or to the floor" (p. 1). Even in this elementary description, the notion of permanence – "A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING, AND EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE" (p. 3) – makes itself felt.

For Lancaster, the organization of space is conditioned by considerations of efficiency and economy as well as the ever present

need for an unobstructed view of the school room. For example, he is explicit in his instructions concerning both the design of the desks behind which his pupils sit, and the location of the furniture: "No half desks should be placed against the walls, nor should any double desks be admitted into the school-room" (Lancaster, 1810, p. 1). He recognizes in these latter items the potential for obstruction and the refuge that they afford the pupils from the master's overseeing eye: "Desks so placed and constructed, merely afford pretense for idleness and play, the scholars being wholly or partly out of their master's sight" (p. 2). The utility of the desks is, then, of paramount importance whether viewed simply as stations at which the pupils gather in the regimented learning process, or whether as potential obstacles to observation. The objective is to process as many pupils as possible. Consequently each piece of furniture must be of the optimal size and shape:

There can be no propriety in filling a room with timber when the space is wanted for the children. Desks and forms when of a broader surface than is actually needed, really occupy that room, which, were they made of proper dimensions, would contain more desks and consequently more children. (Lancaster, 1810, p. 2)

Hence the importance that Lancaster places on the location of passageways designed to permit the rapid movement of his pupils: "Room should be left between each desk for a passage for the boys, that the scholars in one desk may go out without disturbing those in another" (1810, p. 1). Everything is pared down to the minimum permissible dimensions that will allow a continued functioning of the system. The pupils may be packed in to the school room, but if the desks and forms are shaped such as to prevent collision, then the process can, in theory at least, proceed unimpeded, no child interfering with another despite their close proximity and the desire for rapid deployment: "The ends or corners of the desks and forms, should be rounded off, as the boys, when running quickly in and out, are apt to hurt themselves by running against them" (p. 1).

No part of the design is complete unless it conforms to the demands of constant vigilance and observation. The desks may be constructed so as to afford no protection from the master's eye, but Lancaster ensures the pupils' visibility by raising, literally, the

master's position: "At the head of the school there should be an elevated platform for the master's desk, as a convenient place to overlook the school" (Lancaster, 1810, p. 1). Again there is the tension between the desire for a school that will process as many pupils as possible on the one hand, and the requirement to facilitate their movement on the other. Much of the monitorial punishment process rests, as we have already seen, with the objective of establishing in the pupils a sense of place, a permanent identification with the school, with one's class. That is not to say, however, that the daily routine demands that the school's inmates be frozen into immobility. Lancaster implies this when he speaks of the desks' design of course. He is explicit though when considering how the spatial organization of the room contributes to the greater order. Once more he uses a military allusion to establish his position: "Children confined in a small school-room, can no more be expected to be in order, than soldiers can perform their exercise without a parade" (p. 1). "Parade" in this context is arguably ambiguous. The school-room in his opinion, it seems clear, is an arena within which the effects of the disciplinary machinery make themselves manifest. The room is far from being an area simply within which instruction takes place. That is to say, his organization of the school extends much farther than a separation or isolation of an institutional area. The definition of the school – that "long square, or parallelogram" (p. 1) is only the starting point. The space within the rectangle's perimeter must be meticulously delimited, its surface divided, its functions established. Each separate location is designed with the overall efficiency of the others in mind. Nothing may be permitted to escape the master's vigilance. But, lest the master's view of the operation, the "parade" that is a continual integrated functioning of these separate but dependent parts, stand in danger of losing its power to observe, then Lancaster designs a solution to forestall that eventuality also:

Wherever the floor of a school-room can be placed on an inclined plane it should be so. The master being stationed at the lower end of this plane, the elevation of the floor at the farther end of the room, would cause a corresponding elevation of the desks placed there, so that, from the platform the boys at the last desk would be as much in view as those at the first. (p. 2)

Representation

Joseph Lancaster (1810) includes an illustration as a frontispiece to his book, *The British System of Education* (Figure 2). It is an illustration that demands comment, not only because of its content which is ostensibly simple, but also for the fairly detailed description of it which Lancaster provides some six pages later. The author finds it necessary to title the page "Explanation of the Frontispiece."

The monitor [he writes] is represented standing with a pointing stick in his hand, to enable him to point out the best performance, without touching the writing on the slate, which might accidentally obliterate the writing.

The boys are represented as sitting in the first desk in a class, in common with which they are exhibiting their slates, at the command from the monitor – "Show Slates!"

They are represented as having written not merely a word, but a sentence; and a sentence that every true Briton will wish to be engraven, not only on the memory, but on the hearts of the rising generation, as a tribute of duty to the monarch, who reigns in the affections of his people:

"Long Live the King!" (1810, p. ii)

It is, arguably, no accident that Lancaster uses "represented" three times in this short passage to establish his reading of the illustration. It is, after all, an abstraction, a sharply focused and concentrated depiction of what he would have us believe is the conformity of the educational procedure, a procedure, we might say – after Foucault – reduced to its ideal form. The details that will become so apparent in later monitorial material – the straight lines, the grid-like floor patterns – do not yet form part of this introductory picture. The minimal details apparently confirm Lancaster's assertions, but why is the representation so significant? It seems that he feels the need to explain just what it is that his characters represent, to somehow supplement the representation. Something, perhaps, manifests itself in the picture demanding, albeit unconsciously, an explication of what is apparently obvious.

Although the boys under the monitor's charge are sitting down, their bench and desk are elevated such that from the perspective of the viewer, both pupils and monitor are at eye level. In his hand, as Lancaster says, the monitor holds a pointer, an instrument with

which to indicate excellence, but in the illustration the pointer barely indicates at all. An extension of the arm of its possessor, it seems superfluous giving no impression of its being raised or lowered. In so far as it points, it attracts attention to nothing, its end being directed not to the slate of any particular boy, but to an indefinable area beneath the desks where they sit. The monitor is, then, represented in precisely the way that Lancaster describes him, but the representation is at variance with the function that the boy performs. The pointer, if it does anything, enhances the distance between the boy in front of the desks, and the pupils behind them. It is as if it forces the monitor to take up a position from which the other students are always in view. Thus, instead of moving forward to use the pointer in the way that Lancaster describes, the monitor seems, rather, to be retreating; his body is tilted slightly backwards, his weight is on his rear leg, and whereas the pointer's tip is virtually indistinguishable, what attracts our attention is the pool of light in which he stands. The light's source is directly behind him, a fact that we ascertain from the position and direction of the shadow. That same light encompasses four boys who sit in front of him, only now the light is more intense. With the exception of the boy on the bench's end, there is no shadow thrown. The wall behind them – light vertical engraving on the right, and becoming darker on the left hand side – is noticeable for an almost semi-almond shaped white space against which they are silhouettes. It is like the white of an eye, as if in some strange fashion the artist has projected the monitor's vision symbolizing it and inscribing its objects whose determination is obvious only to the monitor, and to the viewer who observes the tableau that the engraving depicts.

The observer, then, *sees* the monitor *seeing*. We do not see as if through his eyes, but rather look from the outside, able to see what he sees while at the same time we can detect those areas that might escape his attention. Is there not an anxiety in Lancaster's representation? If the four boys directly in front of the monitor are directly in his view, their inability to escape it symbolized by the halo of light against which they are outlined, the same is not true of the boys on the monitor's left. The first two to be enveloped in the darkening area have their heads turned towards each other. Far from showing interest in making the content of their lesson an object

of examination, they seem to be engaged in conversation with each other. On the boundary of what is literally light and dark, the monitor's power suffers a degree of dissipation.

If we look carefully, we count *ten* slates in whole or in part that the boys present for inspection. However, we see only *nine* boys. Why, we must ask, should this be? It is not simply a matter of perspective. A slight shift of the monitor's position to his right would have been ample to bring the missing child into view. Indeed, a closer inspection indicates that there is room enough in the picture as it is to have included enough of the anonymous pupil's head to have confirmed his presence. It is difficult to say with any authority whether this is an oversight, but it cannot go unremarked that beneath the desk that accommodates the boys, the pupils' legs are visible; visible that is to say for nine of the pupils only. The tenth's are as absent as is the remainder of his body. Whether consciously or not, the artist (and we don't know who that is, since the engraving does not include a signature) has omitted all representation of this tenth boy. Or has he? That is to say, in an illustration that is so apparently concerned with representation that Lancaster reinforces it with a written explanation, should the absence be taken as a lack of representation, or rather as representing a certain anxiety or recognition? Perhaps there is a tacit acknowledgment that despite the objective and the plan of the monitorial school, there is always an element, at least at this early stage, that is able to escape detection. And this in turn constitutes the reason for the written explanation. In other words, Lancaster's expansion and argument arises out of the inherent weaknesses that he has, perhaps subconsciously, admitted but not yet addressed.

There is no evidence of the pupils being controlled by the intersecting gaze of independent observers. The monitor's position allows him to fix in his view those directly in front of him, but those who are in his peripheral vision – those represented by increasing shadow – those pupils are not as yet controlled, propelled into conformity by the certainty that they might be seen at anytime. And if their position in the dark indicates a degree of freedom from observation, it can also suggest a reciprocal ability on their part to observe. The boys on the extreme left of the engraving look towards the monitor. Although they present their slates to the front at the

same angle as the others, and although they appear to be paying attention to the monitor, it is their representative function with which we ought to be concerned. From our position as observer we are able to see at a glance one of the productive features of the panopticism that fuels the monitorial machine. For while we see the monitor observing, we also see him being observed. This is one of the great and fundamental cornerstones of this disciplinary apparatus. No one, supervisor or supervised, is exempt from view, from examination, from classification. From the relative obscurity of their position at the desk's extreme end, a position that is *represented* by the heaviest shadow, from this position of concealment they exercise a component in the power relationship upon which the disciplinary regime depends. We must not lose sight of the fact, though, that the monitor does not stand at the apex of control. He is still subject to the disciplining observation of the master. For the monitor to be effective, he too must operate in the certainty that he too may be viewed, and his potential transgressions may be observed by pupil and master alike. This confirms, rather than modifies, panoptic theory. Although, as Foucault points out, "in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (1979, p. 202), the monitor, does not occupy the "central tower." He operates in a space between the master – the central locus of control – and the subject population – the other pupils – and as a pupil himself is subject to the same unrelenting possibility of observation. The illustration of the Borough Road school reduces the dynamics of observation to a geometrical precision. At this stage, though, Lancaster can only hint at it.

Lancaster concludes his pamphlet with a series of two diagrams and three engravings accompanied by another set of explanatory notes. The former are interesting for their precise delimitation and ordering of the school's interior. However, it is to the first engraving of the series (Figure 3) to which we should turn our attention, comparing it and its own explanation to its equivalent in the frontispiece. The note is remarkable for its brevity: "[It is] a representation of boys reading a lesson, on the plan of one book serving for the whole school. The monitor with a pointing stick, pointing out part of the same" (1810, p. 55). Now, at the end of this booklet the author does not feel the same need to explain in detail

the illustration's contents, indicating perhaps a lessening of what was, arguably, his earlier anxiety or concern.

We note immediately that our vantage point has altered radically. We seem to be slightly higher than hitherto, as if we too, like the master, view the scene from a position of heightened elevation. Our position is also different in so far as we now see the monitor full-face. The illustration's shading is slightly darker on our right than it is on the opposite side, but nevertheless no pupil is reduced to invisibility; all eight are accounted for. The boys are noticeable for the precision with which they stand in front of the lesson card. Without exception they are situated within the semi-circle that has been marked out with geometrical accuracy for the purpose. Thus located, they distance themselves from the monitor who uses his pointer in a manner that conforms to Lancaster's note. Whereas in the frontispiece the light illuminated only a section of the subject pupils, now it shines from behind them, illuminating the text that is the object of their attention while making both them and the monitor clearly visible.

There is no way of knowing whether the earlier engraving and explanation preceded chronologically the inclusion of the final items. And yet it does seem that by the process of theorizing his system (albeit simplistically and rhetorically influenced), the author comes to recognize the weaknesses – the blind spots one might say – and attempts to counter them. So much of what the text contains finds its way into this illustration. All of the boys have hats slung over their backs in the manner that he has earlier decreed: "every boy sling[s] his hat across his shoulders, as a soldier would sling his knapsack" (Lancaster, 1810, p. 2). The posture of each is almost identical – the boys stand upright, their hands clasped behind them. This conformity, an undeniable homogeneity, reflects the militaristic order that invests the movement of boys from desk to holding areas in preparation for their reading lessons: "The spaces marked thus ... represent places where boys stand in drafts, with each draft under its respective monitor, when going out of their seats to read" (p. 54). The same precision marks their return: "The blank spaces thus ... represent the place where, on the ringing of a bell, the boys return from their reading stations and form into single file" (pp. 54-55).

They are divided into groups such that the height of each boy is the same. This pictorial representation constitutes, perhaps, a metaphor for the necessity to form classes of boys of identical ability: "Any number of boys, whose proficiency is nearly equal in what they are learning, should be classed together" (Lancaster, 1810, p. 3). And the groups are split in this illustration to reveal the figure of the monitor, this essential and indispensable actor in the system. Separated from the pupils, their space and his fully delineated, their attention unwavering, he is also in our full view. There is a confidence in his depiction that the frontispiece lacks. To be sure, he seems to be leaning back in a similar fashion, but he wields his pointer with a new authority. Unquestionably in control, he conducts the movements of the system whose orchestration Lancaster has pointed out in the preceding portions of the text.

*North America and England:
Some Significant Differences*

The monitorial system failed both in England and North America. In hindsight its ultimate demise seems inevitable in that the level of instruction was never better than rudimentary. As one commentator writes, "the system's pivotal weakness revolved around rote memorization of lessons which collapsed when the smallest degree of thought was required of the student" (Rayman, 1981, p. 397). But this argument is only partly valid. It implies that what we might today consider as being worthwhile educational objectives – the encouragement of independent thought, an ability to analyze – were the objectives in the 19th century. This, however, is open to serious doubt, at least insofar as the English experience is concerned, as the preceding analysis of the monitorial school shows. Arguably, the school's discipline and the methods employed to create and enforce it were designed to shape and mold a certain docile subject peculiar to the needs of 19th-century England. But the needs of North America were quite different, the social problems were of a different order, and the spirit of republicanism in America with its concept of the individual, were at odds with the class-driven ideology that demanded acquiescence and obedience from the underprivileged in Britain. Ironically, then, the standards by which failure and success

were measured were different and geographically specific while the reasons for failure were common to both England and America.

The advantage most often cited by monitorial apologists was its sheer efficiency, its ability to instruct simultaneously vast numbers of pupils. In the preface to *The British System of Education*, Joseph Lancaster states: "Two young men lately established schools for a thousand children each, and a lad of seventeen did the same the year before" (1810, p. xviii). The Reverend Andrew Bell's experience was much the same. "By 1814 [the National Society] had 230 schools and 40,484 pupils," according to one English historian (Armytage, 1964, p. 91). Bell's own estimation, not surprisingly perhaps, puts the total higher: In 1816, five years after its formation, the numbers were officially reported to be 100,000. In the following year, 1817, they amounted to upwards of one-half more, 155,000. "In the official report of last year, (1821) it is stated, that 'very little less than' [double the former number, viz] '300,000 children, are now receiving sound religious education in schools united to the Society, or formed mainly on its principles'" (Bell, 1823, p. 33). Regardless of hyperbole, the rate of growth is evident from the following statistics quoted by educational historian Carl Kaestle: "By 1820 there were over 1,100 day schools on the monitorial plan, of which about 235 were affiliated with [Lancaster's British and Foreign School Society], most of the rest belonging to the National Society" (1973, p. 24).

The opportunity to process such a quantity of pupils depends, of course, on two things. First, pupils must exist in large numbers, and second the student population must be located within a small cachement area in order that one school may demonstrate the advantages to be gained through the application of economies of scale. Obviously these conditions prevailed in England, but the situation in Canada was much different. For example, while "there were over thirty Madras schools" by 1827 in New Brunswick (Wilson, et al., 1970, p. 109), the total pupils under instruction numbered 1200, an average of 40 per school, a far cry from Lancaster's envisaged scale of operation. Not only was the total potential student population much less than that existing in England, but also that population was considerably more widely dispersed, there being no major industrial centers on the scale of London and Manchester for instance. The same restriction would no doubt have applied to

other relatively sparsely populated areas of the country, a fact that largely contributed to the inability of the monitorial system to operate with the economic efficiency upon which its success depended.

The ideological motivation was, of necessity, also much different. Canada did not have the traditionally established class divisions that in large part provided an environment in England for the monitorial school system to take root. A rootless and potentially subversive underclass had been a cause of concern in England since the middle ages. Located between the aristocracy who owned most of the land and the deracinated poor who owned nothing existed that class from whom the philanthropists would emerge. The philanthropical class depended upon the underprivileged in order that a reason exist through which the more privileged might demonstrate their largesse. The application of assistance, in this case educational, operated on two fronts. On one flank it confronted the problem of rootlessness and endeavoured, as I have already argued, to instill a sense of place, of belonging in its subjects. On the other flank it sought to address the problem of potential subversiveness by educating the children of the underprivileged. While it contained the threat it endeavoured to exert an influence that would inculcate a loyalty to the state, an unquestioning dependence on the part of the poor to that which was perceived to be helping them. What seems clear is that the disciplinary apparatus of English monitorialism arose out of a desire for social management. As Thomas Markus has argued: "A primary linguistic device is the establishment of classes and classifications systems" (1996, p. 22). The English monitorial school made division visible, wrote itself one might say, into the lexicon of control and surveillance. Transplanted across the Atlantic, however, the system found itself deprived of the societal structure that had provided the material which had sustained it for a relatively longer period in England.

North America's indigenous peoples provided one parallel to England's deracinated and underprivileged. Ronald Rayman has provided us with an account of the attempts to educate the Delaware and Cherokee among others (Rayman, 1981, pp. 395 - 409). Interestingly, one school at Brainerd, Tennessee about which

Rayman writes was "filled to capacity" (p. 401) when it contained 97 pupils in 1821, indicating again the fundamental difference in understanding concerning the scale upon which a monitorial school should operate. A year later "any vestiges of basic educational instruction associated with Lancaster's plan had largely been abandoned in favour of manual labour instruction" (p. 401), one of a number of reasons that contributed to a rapid decline in pupils and the school's eventual closure in 1838. It seems clear that by that time the school had ceased to operate with anything like the monitorial efficiency envisaged by its supporters. Rayman writes: "By 1830, Brainerd teetered precariously on the brink of closing as an average of only twenty students attended, a figure never exceeded at the school's closing" (p. 402). To the extent that the monitorial school "was seized upon by reformers and opportunists as a seemingly potential means to educate Indian children" (p. 404), the experiment mirrored the philanthropists' attempts at the education of the poor in England. That it failed to provide "a solution to Indian education, let alone the entire 'Indian question'" (p. 404), reflected the inadequacy of a social vision that was predicated on notions of division through containment. Of course, the situation of the North American Indian and England's poor was only very roughly similar. The latter were mobile not so much through choice as through necessity. They moved to the growing industrial centers because their rural places of employment had been displaced by collectivization in factories in the name of efficiency and economy. The need for a return to permanence and belonging on the part of the uprooted labour force meant that they became agents of their own physical containment. Thus the further collection of their children in monitorial schools met, in large part, with a measure of approval as the numbers of pupils previously quoted attests. And it was through these schools that the process of mental containment took place, a process whose goal was to instill a sense of class permanence in its subjects, to efface any potential for social betterment.

North America faced a different problem. Where the English industrialist had a vision for a society in which the underprivileged had a place – albeit restricted and contained – the American colonist still saw the native as a problem articulated as a question, "What *do*

we do with the Indians?" as Rayman observes (p. 395). It is significant, I would argue, that not only did the initial attempts at basic education give way to a variety of vocational training as a result of which "Indian children [were] bound out to white craftsmen in strict apprenticeship situations" (p. 401), but also that this change brought about disillusion and dissatisfaction on the part of the childrens' parents. "Indian parents frequently refused to return their children, objecting strenuously that the children worked far too hard for long durations, and were punished far too severely for even the most minor infractions of school rules" (p. 401.) That this was so indicates a certain perception on the part of the subject population of what an education should consist. In other words changes that eventually occurred in this particular monitorial arena resulted in large part from a reaction on the part of the families whose children attended the school. In England, on the other hand, the labourious development of a national system of education resulted from the paternal influence of the sector of society whose position enabled them to effect changes. As usual, the privileged knew what was best for the disadvantaged.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that the advanced disciplinary techniques that prevailed in the English monitorial school both reflected the class divisions that typified English society, and emphasized the anxiety on the part of the wealthy to maintain the social status quo. Nevertheless, these schools provided an inexpensive education – however meager and inadequate by current standards – to a sector of the population that otherwise might never have seen the inside of a school. And so we must ask what the monitorial school achieved, despite its obvious and manifold shortcomings. Ironically, as I have shown, the term monitorial came to be associated with an effective and efficient method of providing an education. Lancaster arrived in America to promote his system even as proof of its inadequacy and his own financial ineptitude was obvious in England; it is a powerful testament to his powers of persuasion that educational reformers allowed themselves to be influenced in favor of the monitorial school. What is important here, though, is that those reformers were indeed looking for an educational system; their desire to establish an

efficient and economical method of delivering instruction blinded them to the ideological motivation that underlay the method in England. They did not in fact, I would argue, fully appreciate or understand the true nature of the school that they were so ready to endorse. But in their innocence lay the seeds of their eventual disenchantment, a lack of satisfaction that would influence the design and administration of schools and school systems that would follow.

Paradoxically, the monitorial school's largest contribution to the field of education lay in its very failure. It must be remembered that schools run under the monitorial regime were essentially private enterprises. It was, after all, the lack of public funding that led to the drive for increased efficiencies and economies of scale. Regardless of whatever visions of social control may have motivated many monitorial apologists, the fact remained that the institutions were schools, and increasingly society was changing its mind about what precisely a school should constitute and upon whom the responsibility for education should fall. In America, as Alison Prentice writes,

The campaign for universal and for better schooling became a crusade, and it was soon seen that the crusade's success depended on government intervention ... and by 1850 nearly every state in the North was well on the way to a permanent system of centrally controlled tax-supported common schools.
(cited in Wilson et al., 1970 p. 42)

In Canada, monitorial schools failed not simply because of their own inadequacies, but, rather, because of the recognition that widespread improved schooling demanded state intervention. As early as 1802, New Brunswick passed *The Parish School Act* whose purpose it was to establish elementary schools supported by public funds, and in 1816 Upper Canada passed the *Common School Act* which officially recognized the state's responsibility to ensure access to education for all sectors of society. Nova Scotia, too, saw the necessity of public funding for education following a report in 1825 by "a joint committee of the Assembly and Council ... on the state of education in the province" (Wilson, et al., 1970 p. 99). This report met with strong opposition, and its recommendations were not adopted. The next year saw the introduction of more legislation which provided for

the provision of funds for education by assessment “upon two-thirds of the rateable inhabitants’ in a given district” (p. 99). It was this provision, Wilson observes, that delayed the implementation of free education in Nova Scotia until 1864. In England, progress towards state intervention was even more painfully slow. The conflict along religious lines between the Anglican Reverend Andrew Bell and the Non-conformist Lancaster typifies the history of the English monitorial movement. Religion also influenced the debate concerning the state’s responsibility to educate its citizens, one concern being whether “religious liberty could be reconciled with a State-controlled system of schools” (Adamson, 1930, p. 31). In a supreme irony, one agitator for public financial educational support declared, “I am for the American system as it stands’ ... lending his voice to the National Public School Association ... which had, since 1847, been campaigning for rate aid to education whether given in religious schools or not” (Armytage, 1964, p. 119).

One reason for the apparent attractiveness of the monitorial system was its ability to economize on teachers at a time when neither the facilities nor the funding were available for training. English educational historian R.W. Rich argues in an early essay on the monitorial system, “the low quality of the early training establishments was due more to the empty pocket than to the unenlightened mind” (1933, p. 23). His assessment implies a degree of altruism on the part of monitorial apologists that I have been concerned to refute; in an oblique way, however, the monitorial school’s concern with efficiency and economy drew attention to the need for teacher training of a much higher quality. The typical school needed only one master, a squad of monitors disseminating the lesson to the pupils. If the method of monitorialism was to be employed in new schools that method had to be learned, and as a result “Lancaster began in 1805 to board a selected number of monitors as ‘apprentices’”(Armytage, 1964, p. 92). He was to eventually move to a private establishment with his apprentices, but rudimentary teacher training was carried on at Borough road, the site of his first school and what was eventually to become the oldest teacher training establishment in the commonwealth. That is not to say that the credit for informed instruction of teachers is Lancaster’s educational legacy. His apprentices could never properly be called

teachers, his concern being more with the inculcation of monitorial method: "It was the mechanism that mattered, and not the personnel responsible for the working of the mechanism" (Rich, 1933, p. 3). Indeed, as Rich points out, "It took nearly forty years for the country to realize that a system which deposes the schoolmaster from the post of teacher, and makes him merely a supervisor, can never be an instrument of true education" (p. 2). Nevertheless, monitorialism had shown the need for a system of teacher education. The monitorial system has met with almost universal condemnation: "After the manner of patent medicines, it wrought apparently great benefit at first, but its after-effects did much to hinder natural progress" (p. 1). Its faults were many and obvious, its failure predictable. And yet it is as a result of its inadequacies that educational reformers were able to recognize the areas upon which a move to universal education should concentrate. Monitorialism's failure does not detract from its influences upon subsequent pedagogical philosophy. One of the monitorial method's most enduring legacies was the iron-like discipline upon which it depended. Well into the 1900s, as the photograph of a school in London, England (Figure 4) confirms, the necessity for conformity, the determination of each individual's space, still informs the classroom's organization. From the "sitting at attention" position of the pupils, to their undeniable and constant visibility resulting from the room's gradual elevation from front to rear, we appreciate the relentless grasp that Bell and Lancaster maintained on the thoughts of their successors. The lessons that emerge from the study of monitorialism should constitute a warning at a time when an ostensible concern with efficiency and economy implies the need for return to a simpler, more definable educational golden age.

Figure 1. Interior of Borough Road School

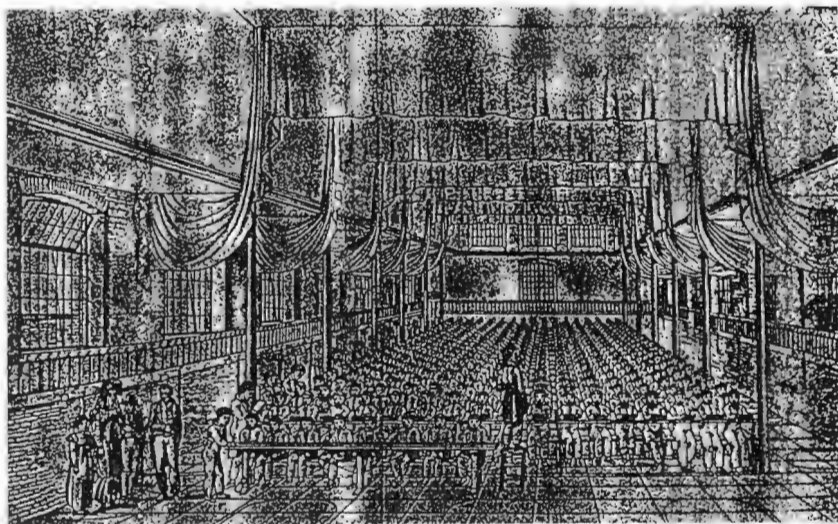


Figure 2. Illustration from the Frontispiece to
The British System of Education

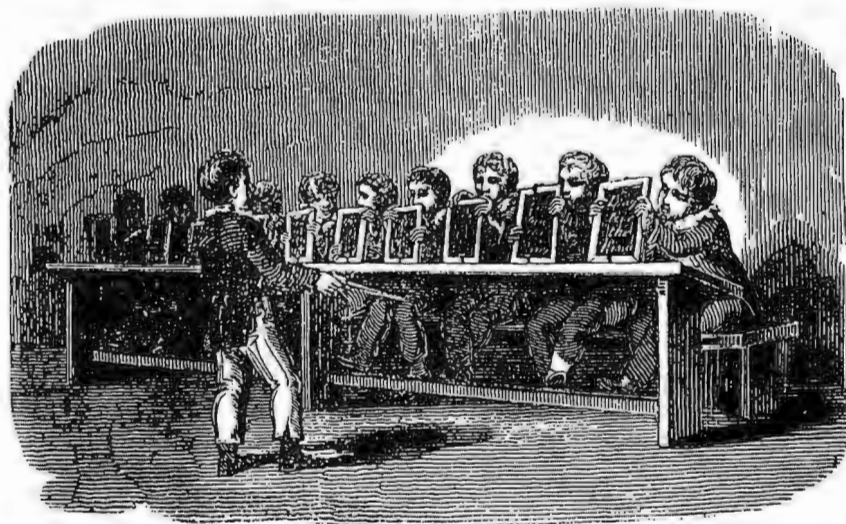


Figure 3.

Engraving from
The British System of Education

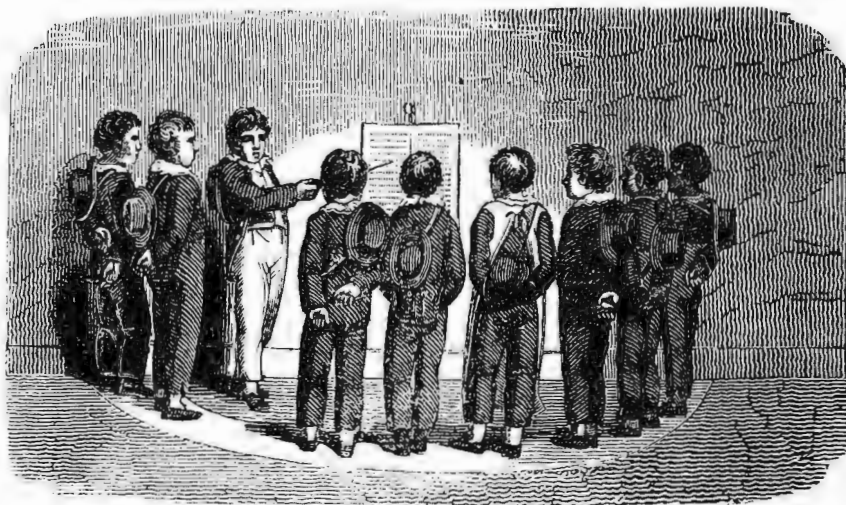


Figure 4.

Photograph of London, England
School Room and its Pupils – Early 1900s



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