Journal for
Eighteenth-Century Studies

Education in the Eighteenth Century
A Special Virtual Issue

Introduction
Michèle Cohen

From its early days, this *Journal* published articles on education, its editors seeing beyond the disciplinary boundaries that tend to consign 'education' to a specialized field. Instead, the *Journal* published articles which exploited the interdisciplinarity of the subject, demonstrating how deeply intertwined education was with social, cultural and political developments in the long eighteenth century. The *Journal* has published articles on the education of the poor and of the rich, on the education of girls and of boys, on the teaching of science to girls and of religion to boys, on children's literature and children's books in England and France, on experimental schools in France and Germany, on ideas about the curriculum in England and Russia. The selection of articles for this online issue aims to show the continuing breadth and the high quality of the research published by the *Journal* and the continuing contribution this research has made to defining eighteenth-century studies in original and challenging ways.

How was education defined in the eighteenth century? 'Education' could include instruction in specific intellectual, academic or practical skills, mental and physical improvement, and aimed at the inculcation of virtue as well as the acquisition of manners, politeness and expressive skills. The variety of meanings that can be attached to education is addressed by D. S. Wilson 's 'The Treatment of Education in the *Encyclopédie*' (1988). Wilson points out that a lot of information about education is included in entries other than under the obvious headings – 'classes, college, education' – and his aim is to draw attention to this less well known material. It reveals that contrary to the claim that the *Encyclopédie* deals mainly with articles about boys and their 'secondary' schooling, it includes a considerable amount of material on the education of the very young. The article is immensely useful because, while it provides an overview of authors and topics concerned with 'education', it also highlights how intense the more general preoccupation with education was in the period, even among contributors to the *Encyclopédie*.

The second article selected for inclusion here, John Dunkley's 'Berquin's *L'ami des enfants* and the Hidden Curriculum of Class Relations' (1993), explains how, for Arnaud Berquin, writing specifically for children aimed principally to offer them behavioural models: the good child

and the bad child. Berquin wrote in the style he imagined would be most accessible to children under ten years old. While this produces 'flat' characters and stilted conversations, this accessibility was important for another reason: to ensure that his middle-class readers would all speak French at a time when *patois* was denigrated as a marker of inferior social class. Dunkley's aim is to pay attention to the significant cultural work being performed by such stories, however moralistic, or dated they may appear – a point also made by Penny Brown and Gillian Dow in their articles discussed below. Dunkley's article is interesting for another reason: his critique of an historiography which dismissed Berquin's work as insipid and sentimental. This allows us to gauge how much things have changed since, in the field of children's literature, inspired by articles such as his.[1]

Like Dunkley, Penny Brown's 'Capturing (and Captivating) Childhood: The Role of Illustrations in Eighteenth-Century Children's Books in Britain and France' (2008) reads the systems of value and culture embodied in children's books, but she focuses on their illustrations. Brown argues that books were powerful tools of socialization and the images in them, however crude, were meant to exemplify models of behaviour and 'capture the impressionable child reader within a predetermined nexus of social and moral values'. However she also suggests that because the images reflect the world in which the readers lived, these texts provide a useful entry into eighteenth-century cultural history.

While Dunkley's article addresses the 'hidden curriculum' of class relations as it is presented to (mostly middle-class) readers, Dianne Payne's 'London's Charity School Children: The 'Scum of the Parish'? (2006) is concerned with the curriculum for London's real poor.[2] Payne challenges received ideas about the fecklessness of families whose children attended charity schools and shows on the contrary that they were 'for the most part, the children of the settled and industrious poor'. The curriculum of these schools was the subject of much controversy throughout the century, and Payne shows, like Cohen below, that the curriculum, is a political tool in that it is constructed not to *fit* a particular type of individual so much as to *produce* the individual to fit an ideology - be it social class, gender or national character. What the children were permitted to learn shifted to accommodate 'both ideological and vocational' attitudes in the upper classes who permitted that education. A particularly fascinating feature of Payne's article is her evidence of the children's actual experience of the schooling. Even just basic literacy changed their lives.

Cora Ann Howells' '"The proper education of a female. . . Is still to seek": Childhood and girls' education in Fanny Burney 's *Camilla*; or, a picture of youth' (1984) presents a pessimistic view of the education of children of the leisured classes through her reading of Burney's *Camilla* (1796), whose heroine is educated at home. Howells argues that Burney highlights a fundamental contradiction in the education of young children of both sexes. While the freedom, even the waywardness, of childhood experience is charming and encouraged, children are misled about the eventual necessity to conform to social

conventions which limit and 'damage' them as adults. Who will take responsibility for preparing girls especially for the 'dreadful obstacle race that [they] have to run in eighteenth century society' and the 'systematic deformation' they undergo under the 'social pressures to assume stereotypes deemed culturally necessary'?

Michèle Cohen's 'A Little Learning'? The Curriculum and the Construction of Gender Difference in the Long Eighteenth Century' (2006) focuses on a different facet of middle- and upper-class girls' education, their instructional curriculum. She challenges the often repeated assumption that a domestic education was necessarily inadequate, and argues that while there was little difference between a school and a home education, the home was likely to be better furnished with books. Her key point is that the female curriculum was designed not, as was claimed, to 'meet' the needs of femininity but to construct a particular version of femininity, one assumed to be superficial and lacking in the mental depth and strength imputed to males.

Richard de Ritter 's ' "Leisure to be wise": Edgeworthian Education and the Possibilities of Domesticity' (2010) similarly challenges assumptions about the inferiority of domestic education, arguing rather that it was 'underwritten by an ethic of intellectual labour'. Ritter suggests that an exclusive concern in the historiography with women's access to the public sphere may have served to downgrade the private sphere, and proceeds to demonstrate how Maria Edgeworth had worked to show that the domestic sphere was a site allowing women 'the leisure to be wise'. Discussing these issues allows him to reappraise conventional notions of the public and the private.

The international approach early adopted by the *Journal* is exemplified by David Saunders's 'History teaching in Late Eighteenth-Century Russia' (1987) and Gillian Dow's 'The British Reception of Madame de Genlis's Writings for Children: Plays and Tales of Instruction and Delight' (2006). Saunders' article reveals that, in the eighteenth century, Russia already had a uniform educational system, whose 'harmony and balance' would have been hindered by the teaching of specifically Russian rather than more universal history. The Commission on Popular Schools, set up in 1782 by Catherine the Great, took seventeen years to produce a history of Russia. Saunders maps the complex ways in which attitudes towards the commissioning of histories of Russia had to change. This clearly demonstrates the changing role of the teaching of history in society.

French and English relations in the eighteenth century were often difficult. Yet, despite cultural tensions, Dow demonstrates that Mme de Genlis' educational writings were as popular in England as in France. Genlis' writing offered young girls in Britain a means of learning useful moral lessons while practicing French, a valued accomplishment. While Genlis' educational writings were usually met with approval in France, Dow analyses their more ambivalent reception in Britain. A variety of reviews recommended her writings for

their moral rectitude, and Mary Wollstonecraft, who shared with Genlis a commitment to the education of women and the role the rational woman could play in society, also approved of her, although with a few reservations. Like Dunkley and Brown, Dow argues that Genlis' texts are more useful than has usually been realised for those struggling to get a picture of how the world was understood by children.

It could be argued that before the really very recent expansion of the scholarship on eighteenth-century female education , almost all writing about education discussed males. But it was a generic male that was usually discussed, and rarely were these boys discussed in terms of their masculinity. William Van Reyk 's 'Educating Christian Men in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: Public-School and Oxbridge Ideals', (2009) was therefore a welcome contribution. Van Reyk argues that concern over 'moralism' and the inadequacy of religious instruction at public schools and universities was already underway in the eighteenth century, well before the Evangelical Revival. There was disagreement about religious provision, especially regarding the place of the Classics in the syllabus of the public schools, since it was feared that they were taught at the expense of religion. However all agreed that the main aim of education was 'the formation of Christian men'. The ideal model for this masculinity was Christ, and the imitation of Christ at the heart of all of Christian masculinity.

K. E. Smith' s 'Autonomy and perfectibility: the educational theory of Godwin's *The Enquirer* ' (1982) is a fitting choice to close this collection because Godwin's notion of 'perfectibility' not only encapsulates the best outcome of Enlightenment thought on education, but continues to infuse, explicitly or not, all notions of education. Although Godwin's concern with developing and respecting the autonomy of the child in an educational process based on motivation rather than compulsion is important, it is his concept of 'perfectibility' which is most significant. Smith discusses how this concept differs from the concept of 'perfection' and how it is integrated in Godwin's idea of the true aim of education, as 'the process of perfecting the individual'. The concept of perfectibility opens up the possibility of the continual change and development of individuals of any social class, and because the perfectibility of the individual offers the improvement of society itself, it has considerable democratic implications.

One aim of this online collection of essays was to make different articles speak to each other. One of the most important conversations in this selection concerns the relationship between rich and poor children. Dunkley's analysis of Berquin's stories, like Dow's of the work of Genlis, shows that a central issue is how affluent children should be taught virtue and the pleasures of benevolence without allowing their charity to present a challenge to the social hierarchy.[3] Some of Berquin's stories are explicit about the harsh realities of poverty, though these are not directly addressed. Rather, in Berquin and Genlis, the (deserving) poor are idealised and dignified by their 'noble acceptance of their situation' as Dunkley puts it. The

illustrations Brown discusses support these analyses. Illustrations abound in both French and English children's books, depicting the moment of gift exchange between the well-to-do child and an elderly person or a child whose appearance speaks of their poverty. The focus of the charitable act, all authors argue, is the moral lesson for the privileged child.
Another conversation concerns girls' intellectual education. Cohen and Ritter both revalue the domestic space as a site allowing women's minds to develop challenging conventional assumptions about both the domestic spaces and what knowledge was available to girls. Sam George's articles on teaching science to girls are an important part of this conversation, though space constraints excluded them, along with several other conversations, from my selection.[4]

The *Journal*'s 2008 change of title, from the *British Journal* to simply the *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies* speaks of the continuing broad perspective which enables it to include education as an integral part of part of the study of the eighteenth century. It is a trail blazed by all the authors in this selection.

List of articles selected

D S Wilson , The Treatment of Education in the Encyclopédie, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 11, Issue 1, March 1988: 27–38,

John Dunkley, 'Berquin's L'Ami des Enfants and the Hidden Curriculum of Class Relations' *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 16, Issue 2, September 1993: 185–196.

Penny Brown, Capturing (and captivating) childhood: The Role of Illustrations in Eighteenth- Century Children's Books in Britain and France, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 31, Issue 3, September 2008 : 419–449.

Coral Ann Howells ,' "The Proper education of a Female …is still to seek": Childhood and Girls' Education in Fanny Burney's Camilla; or, a picture of Youth', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 7, Issue 2, September 1984: 191–198.

Dianne Payne, 'London's Charity School Children: The "Scum of the Parish"? ' *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies,* Volume 29, Issue 3, September 2006: 383–397.

Michèle Cohen , ' "A Little Learning"? The Curriculum and the Construction of Gender Difference in the Long Eighteenth Century, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies,* Volume 29, Issue 3, September 2006: 321–335.

Richard De Ritter ' "Leisure to be Wise": Edgeworthian education and the possibilities of Domesticity', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 33, Issue 3, September 2010: 313–333.

David Saunders, 'History Teaching in Late Eighteenth-Century Russia' *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 10, Issue 2, September 1987: 139–151.

Gillian Dow, 'The British Reception of Madame de Genlis's Writing for Children: Plays and Tales of Instruction and Delight,' *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 29, Issue 3, September 2006: 367–381.

William Van Reyk, 'Educating Christian Men in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: Public School and Oxbridge Ideals,' *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies,* Volume 32, Issue 3, September 2009: 425–437.

K. E Smith 'Autonomy and Perfectibility: The Educational Theory of Godwin's The Enquirer, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 5, Issue 2, September 1982: 217–224.

---

[1] See for example *The Making of the Modern Child: Children's Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century*, New York: Routledge, 2003; Andrea Immel and Michael Whitmore (eds.), *Childhood and Children's Books in Early Modern Europe 1550-1800,* New York: Routledge, 2006.

[2] See also Deborah Simonton, 'Schooling the Poor: Gender and Class in Eighteenth-Century England', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 23, (2000), 183-202.

[3] M.O. Grenby makes a similar point in '"Real Charity Makes Distinctions": Schooling the Charitable Impulse in Early British Children's Literature, *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 25 (2002), 185–202.

[4] Sam George 'Linnaeus in Letters and the cultivation of the female mind: "Botany in an English Dress"', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28 (2005), 1–18 and 'Animated Beings: Enlightenment Entomology for Girls,' *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33 (2010), 487-505.