From Mr. M'Choakumchild to Bradley Headstone: Impact of Ongoing Educational Reforms on Schoolteachers in *Hard Times* and *Our Mutual Friend*

Akiko Takei, Chukyo University, Japan

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Abstract

Charles Dickens maintained a sustained engagement with contemporary education, specifically regarding its provision for the working class and individuals experiencing poverty. He interrogated the structural deficiencies of the education and teaching systems through his portrayals of diverse schools and teachers. In *Hard Times* (1854), he satirized the pupil-teacher system, established by the 1846 regulations, embodied in M'Choakumchild, whose mechanical and fact-driven pedagogy exemplified the shortcomings of utilitarian education. A decade later, in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65), Dickens revisited these concerns through Bradley Headstone—a complex central antagonist much different from M'Choakumchild, an unlikeable minor character. This more nuanced treatment signals the schoolteachers' evolving social and professional standing, while reflecting the impact of the 1862 Revised Code. Shaped by economic imperatives and utilitarian ideals, the Code further instrumentalized education, increasing pressures on teachers. Headstone's obsessive and violent traits can be interpreted as manifestations of the psychological strain imposed by these reforms. His tense relationship with Charley Hexam encapsulates the transition from apprenticeship-based pupil-teacher training to the mechanical and structured discipline ushered in by the Code.

Keywords: Charles Dickens, education reform, utilitarianism, the pupil-teacher system, the Revised Code

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Introduction

Charles Dickens observed the evolving landscape of Victorian Britain. His fiction offers both storytelling and a sustained critique, specifically of how education was delivered to the working class and the poor. Through his portrayals of schools and teachers, he interrogated the structural deficiencies of the systems shaped by the then-existing education reforms. In *Hard Times* (1854), he satirized the 1846 pupil-teacher system and teacher-training colleges through the character of M'Choakumchild. Owing to the overemphasis on facts and data, M'Choakumchild exemplifies the shortcomings of utilitarian pedagogy—education stripped of imagination, empathy, and moral depth.

A decade later, Dickens revisited these concerns with greater psychological complexity in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65). Bradley Headstone, a central antagonist and schoolteacher, reflects the intensified pressures of the 1862 Revised Code (hereinafter, the Code)—a policy under which school funding was based upon pupils' performance and teaching was further instrumentalized. Unlike M'Choakumchild, Headstone is a tragic figure whose obsessive and violent tendencies suggest the psychological toll of a system that valued discipline and efficiency. Headstone's relationship with his pupil, Charley Hexam encapsulates the transition from apprenticeship-based training to the rigid, result-driven discipline of the Code. Together, these characters highlight the shifting social and professional standing of teachers and the emotional costs of reform-era education.

Through these literary portraits in *Hard Times* and *Our Mutual Friend,* Dickens resists the realities of Victorian schooling. Previous Dickens's studies have deemed the impact of utilitarianism in *Hard Times* as a matter of course; however, it is seldom linked with the details of the pupil-teacher system (for instance, Collins, 1965; Manning, 1959/2021). The influence of the Code has been rarely considered except in Sean Grass's 2020 study, which argues:

> The novel attacks primarily neither the methods nor the qualifications of teachers such as Headstone but rather the underlying premises of the 1862 Revised Code, which upended, at a moment of increasing social mobility, the conventional sense of the 'value' that education provided by ignoring its role in fostering usefulness, empathy and social cohesion and instead tying it narrowly to individual financial gain and class ambition. (p. 30)

By referring to the backgrounds of these two reforms, this study discusses the persuasiveness of Dickens's characterization.

The Condition of Elementary Education Before 1846

Prior to 1846, the system of elementary education in Britain was characterized by fragmentation and inconsistency, with the quality of teaching being influenced by factors such as social class and financial resources. The governance of schools was the responsibility of religious organizations, philanthropic societies, or private individuals, and there was no national system to govern schools and teachers. It is evident that each educational institution possessed its own set of standards, curricula, and objectives. Education for children from affluent and middle-class backgrounds was typically provided in the domestic environment or at grammar schools. Conversely, children from working-class backgrounds frequently had restricted or no access to structured educational opportunities. The present study examines the

topic of education for Victorian working-class children. Table 1 presents a selection of the most common types of schools for them.

Table 1
Popular Schools for Victorian Working-Class Children

Type	Description
Dame school	- Run by elderly women at their home - Basic literacy; small fee
Sunday school	- Basic secular and religious education, part-time - Popular until the mid-nineteenth century
Charity school	- Run by Anglican church or nonconformist church
Ragged school	- Emerged in the 1840s - Free food and clothing
Industrial school	- Existed in urban slums - Emphasis on industrial training
Workhouse school	- Minimal education for pauper children - Understaffed, overcrowded

Source: Picard, n.d.; Waite, 2015; Larsen, 2011

These schools were targets of Dickens's criticism. For instance, in the essay entitled "A Sleep to Startle Us" in *Household Words*, issued on March 13, 1852, he wrote of his first visit to Field Lane Ragged School on September 14, 1843. He mentioned its unsanitary environment, underqualified teachers, and bad children:

> It was held in a low-roofed den, in a sickening atmosphere, in the midst of taint, and dirt, and pestilence: with all the deadly sins let loose, howling and shrieking at the doors. Zeal did not supply the place of method and training; the teachers knew little of their office; the pupils, with an evil sharpness, found them out, got the better of them, derided them, made blasphemous answers to scriptural questions, sang, fought, danced, robbed each other; seemed possessed by legions of devils. (Dickens, 1852, p. 577)

In Chapter 10 of *Great Expectations* (1860–61), Dickens again described the horrible conditions of the schools and teachers available to the working class by the school run by Mr. Wopsle's grandaunt—an incompetent teacher, low-standard teaching, and uncontrolled children (Dickens, 1860–61/1994, pp. 62–63; Takei, 2025, pp. 376–77).

The income and social standing of schoolteachers were low. Thomas Babington Macaulay's comment in the speech which he delivered in the House of Commons on April 19, 1847 was biased, yet it typified his contemporaries' view of schoolteachers:

> The masters the refuse of all other callings, discarded footmen, ruined pedlars, men who cannot work a sum in the rule of three, men who cannot write a common letter without blunders, men who do not know whether the earth is a sphere or a cube, men

> who do not know whether Jerusalem is in Asia or America. (Macaulay, 1847/1898, p. 247)

This contempt for schoolteachers by the well-to-do continued for a lengthy period.

The 1846 Pupil-Teacher System

However, the implementation of James Kay-Shuttleworth's reforms resulted in an increase in the demand for schoolteachers. The pupil-teacher system was introduced in 1846 with the aim of expanding access to education for the working classes and addressing the shortage of trained teachers. John Manning (1959/2021) asserts that the procurement of a sufficient number of adequately trained teachers was unfeasible without the involvement of the state, although the program was initiated with considerable reluctance (p. 139). The development of British elementary education coincided with the commencement of state involvement in the field.

The pupil-teacher system facilitated the acquisition of gainful employment by the working-class children. Candidates were recruited from humble backgrounds, usually at the age of 13. The participants engaged in classroom duties for a period of five years, concurrently pursuing further education under the supervision of a head teacher. Upon successful completion of their five-year apprenticeship, they were eligible to sit for a Queen's Scholarship Exam, which would grant them admission to training colleges. Following graduation from college with a certification, teachers were acknowledged as fully qualified (Robinson, 2006, pp. 21–22; Takei, 2025, p. 373). Consequently, the number of pupil-teachers increased on a continuous basis.

The road to becoming teachers was competitive and exhausting. The Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education on December 21, 1846 (hereinafter, the 1846 Minutes), which created the pupil-teacher system, provided the qualifications required for pupil-teachers:

> They must be at least thirteen, years of age, and must not be subject to any bodily infirmity likely to impair their usefulness as pupil teachers.
>
> In schools connected with the Church of England, the clergyman and managers, and, in other schools, the managers must certify that the moral character of the candidates and of their families justify an expectation that the instruction and training of the school will be seconded by their own efforts and by the example of their parents. If this cannot be certified of the family, the apprentice will be required to board in some approved household.
>
> Candidates will also be required:−
>
> (1) To read with fluency, ease, and expression.
> (2) To write in a neat hand, with correct spelling and punctuation, a simple prose narrative slowly read to them.
> (3) To write from dictation sums in the first four rules of arithmetic, simple and compound; to work them correctly, and to know the tables of weights and measures.
> (4) To point out the parts of speech in a simple sentence.
> (5) To have an elementary knowledge of geography.
> (6) In schools connected with the Church of England they will be required to repeat the Catechism, and to show that they understand its meaning, and are

> acquainted with the outline of Scripture history. The parochial clergyman will assist in this part of the examination.
>
> In other schools the state of the religious knowledge will be certified by the managers.
> (7) To teach a junior class to the satisfaction of the Inspector.
> (8) Girls should also be able to sew neatly and to knit. (The 1846 Minutes)

At the end of each year, pupil-teachers were examined by inspectors. They would receive a certificate of "good conduct" and "punctuality, diligence, obedience, and attention to their duties" from school managers and supervisors (The 1846 Minutes). These regulations suggested that they aimed to instill middle-class morals and propriety in the working classes. In addition to teaching skills, pupil-teachers' behavior, personalities, health, and family background were severely scrutinized. Asher Tropp (1957) says that illegitimate children were not admitted except for outstanding ones, and living in public houses was not allowed (pp. 21–22). To apply for stipends, the conditions required were harder. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Charley's behavior, such as disliking his sister Lizzy's living situation with Jenny Wren and cutting off Headstone, is officious and ungrateful; however, it makes sense considering the environment of the pupil-teachers.

The achievements of pupil-teachers were not necessarily bad; however, they were not as good as initially expected. As evidence, Matthew Arnold's (1889/1908) school inspection results from 1852 to 1882 are significant. In the 1852 report, he wrote:

> On one other topic, in connection with the subject of pupil-teachers, I am anxious to touch in conclusion. In the general opinion of the advantages which have resulted from the employment of them, I most fully concur; and of the acquirements and general behaviour of the greater number of those of them whom I have examined I wish to speak favourably. But I have been much struck in examining them towards the close of their apprenticeship, when they are generally at least eighteen years old, with the utter disproportion between the great amount of positive information and the low degree of mental culture and intelligence which they exhibit. Young men, whose knowledge of grammar, of the minutest details of geographical and historical facts, and above all of mathematics, is surprising, often cannot paraphrase a plain passage of prose or poetry without totally misapprehending it, or write half a page of composition on any subject without falling into gross blunders of taste and expression. I cannot but think that, with a body of young men so highly instructed, too little attention has hitherto been paid to this side of education; the side through which it chiefly forms the character; the side which has perhaps been too exclusively attended to in schools for the higher classes, and to the development of which it is the boast of what is called classical education to be mainly directed. (Arnold, 1889/1908, pp. 16–17)

Christopher Bischof (2019) points out that Arnold was a supporter of the pupil-teacher system (Ch. 2, para. 3); thus, his criticism of the pupil-teachers was never nitpicking. The pupil-teachers enormously absorbed fragmental facts; however, they had difficulty in applying them to anything substantial. Their learning drained their sensibility. These deficiencies are echoed in Dickens's fictional schoolteachers.

Dickens's Criticism of Utilitarian Education in *Hard Times* (1854)

In *Hard Times*, Dickens critiques Victorian utilitarian education and teacher-training colleges through M'Choakumchild, a schoolteacher at Gradgrind's school. His history is explained as follows:

> He and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. He had been put through an immense variety of paces, and had answered volumes of head-breaking questions. Orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody, biography, astronomy, geography, and general cosmography, the sciences of compound proportion, algebra, land-surveying and levelling, vocal music, and drawing from models, were all at the ends of his ten chilled fingers. He had worked his stony way into Her Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council's Schedule B, and had taken the bloom off the higher branches of mathematics and physical science, French, German, Latin and Greek. He 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. Ah, rather overdone, M'Choakumchild. If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more! (Dickens, 1854/1992, p. 7)

M'Choakumchild belongs to the first generation of training college graduates. Dickens satirizes the 1846 Minutes because its goals for pupil-teachers are similar to M'Choakumchild's learnings. The 1846 Minutes specified that in the fifth year, pupil-teachers were to be tested in the following subjects: an essay on teaching method, algebra, land surveying and leveling, syntax, etymology, prosody, geography, English history, the Holy Scriptures, Liturgy, Catechism, and an impromptu mock lesson. Dickens compares teacher training to manufacturing, training colleges to factories, and teachers to products. Like the aforementioned pupil-teachers in Arnold's 1852 report, M'Choakumchild is overstuffed with a random variety of fragmental knowledge; however, he lacks the capacity to nurture imagination, empathy, or moral insight. His teaching is a product of the utilitarian ideals of the era: measurable, mechanical, but emotionally sterile.

Dickens criticizes the over-standardization of teacher education, where teachers are trained to impose facts on children rather than foster understanding in *Hard Times*. M'Choakumchild's inability to handle pupils like Sissy Jupe underscores the failure of mechanical teaching. The following passage explains her maladjustment to utilitarian education from the teacher's viewpoint:

> M'Choakumchild reported that she [Sissy] had a very dense head for figures; that, once possessed with a general idea of the globe, she took the smallest conceivable interest in its exact measurements; that she was extremely slow in the acquisition of dates, unless some pitiful incident happened to be connected therewith; that she would burst into tears on being required (by the mental process) immediately to name the cost of two hundred and forty-seven muslin caps at fourteen-pence halfpenny; that she was as low down, in the school, as low could be; that after eight weeks of induction into the elements of Political Economy, she had only yesterday been set right by a prattler three feet high, for returning to the question, 'What is the first principle of this science?' the

> absurd answer, 'To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me.' (Dickens, 1854/1992, p. 52)

Brought up in a circus, a world of amusement, fantasy, and wonder, Sissy functions as the emotional and imaginative counterpoint to the rigid utilitarianism embodied by M'Choakumchild and the Gradgrind's school system. Grass (2020) mentions that Sissy is "Dickens's most memorable victim of rote learning and the tyranny of 'Facts'" (p. 36); however, her incompatibility with M'Choakumchild's schooling is a quiet assertion that sensibility, sympathy, and lived experience are essential to human development. Zubair Ahmad Bhat (2016) says that there is truth in Sissy's answers, and she has sincerity to resist difficulties (p. 2394). As Bhat (2016) argues, Dickens gives her a positive role. She is the novel's moral center and a symbol of the enduring power of feeling. Through her, Dickens champions the emotional and moral dimensions of education.

The Change of Teachers' Status and the 1862 Revised Code

Between 1846 and 1862, the working environment of Britain's schoolteachers underwent a significant transformation, shaped by educational reform, class dynamics, and shifting expectations of professionalism. During this period, the schoolteachers' job was fixed in the working classes. Tropp (1957) notes that between 1849 and 1859, the number of pupil-teachers increased from 3,580 to 15,224, and the proportion of female teachers rose from 32% in 1849 to 41% in 1851 and 46% in 1859 (pp. 21–22). Per the 1846 Minutes, teachers' salaries considerably rose and continued rising steadily until the Code was established, though less than those of other professions (Tropp, 1957, p. 39). Due to the state intervention, the teaching standard was improved. In his 1855 report, Arnold esteemed the training college teachers whom he inspected:

> Some of the teachers at this institution, indeed, such as Dr. Cornwell and Mrs. Macrae, are so well and so honourably known to the public, their merits in the service of education have so long been recognised, that to bear testimony now to their admirable qualities is wholly unnecessary. But I may be allowed to express my sense of the rare endowments as a lecturer which Mr. Fitch, the Vice-Principal, appears to me to possess; he has in lecturing the gifts of animation of manner, of exactness, and at the same time fluency of expression, of coherence in his method of treating his subject, to a degree, in my opinion, quite eminent; and these are the most desirable gifts for a lecturer. He is also fully alive to the necessity of infusing into the students something of that general culture, the want of which is perhaps the greatest defect of the present teachers of elementary schools, and the defect hardest to remedy. (Arnold, 1889/1908, pp. 240–41)

These improvements were caused by the social needs for education for the working classes and teachers' efforts. However, the social standing of schoolteachers remained lower than the church and their upper- and middle-class counterparts (Tropp, 1957, pp. 37, 40). During their apprenticeship, they were drilled with middle-class norms but remained subordinate within the education hierarchy.

The turning point came with the Code, introduced by Robert Lowe. The birth of the Code was complicated. Tropp (1957) points out six factors in the 1850s, which led to the establishment of the Code: dissatisfaction with the 1846 Minutes and present popular education, dislike for giving education to the poor, prejudice against certified teachers, extreme nonconformists' opposition to church schools and teachers, hate for state control of education, and the

government's desire to cut the education grant, whose chief architect was William Gladstone (pp. 58–61).

Each factor had a strong impact; however, the reasons for the Code were divided into class consciousness and political and financial needs. First, the middle classes were skeptical of the need to educate the working classes and the poor, and feared that their superiority might be threatened (Tropp, 1957, p. 59). The middle classes considered schoolteachers as those who dared to imitate their social betters (Tropp, 1957, p. 60). Due to the Crimean War (1853–56), the national budget was straitened. Gladstone, as Exchequer, desperately needed to cut expenses. The education grant rose from £150,000 in 1851 to £836,920 in 1859 (Tropp, 1957, p. 61), which was trivial compared with the cost of the Crimean War. However, as an easy target, the plan for cutting the education budget was undertaken.

Lowe was inclined toward economy and class-conscious, disliked educating the poor (Tropp, 1957, p. 80). Thus, he was the best person to enforce the reduced budget to cater to the government. On February 13, 1862, in the House of Commons, he made a speech about the Code. The remark "If it is not cheap, it shall be efficient; if it is not efficient, it shall be cheap" (The House of Commons, 1862) explained the nature of the Code. Jackie Latham (1991) says that the members in the Commons were unfamiliar with elementary education; for them, cheapness was more important than efficacy (p. 7). The Code was a counterattack on the 1846 Minutes and invited controversy and dispute until the enactment of the 1870 Elementary Education Act.

Lowe planned to make schooling more efficient and accountable; however, his reform led to the deterioration of education quality and teachers' living standards. The content of the Code is lengthy. Its key features are summarized below:

- Funding conditional on pupils' performance: Inspectors annually examined pupils' attendance and proficiency in the three Rs. When the overall evaluation did not meet the required standard, the amount of grants was decreased; in the worst cases, no grant was provided.
- Narrowed curriculum: Subjects were limited to the three Rs and some practical knowledge. Other subjects, such as history, geography, and literature, were discouraged.
- Increased pressure on pupils and teachers: They had to prepare for the inspections, and passing exams was prioritized.
- Teachers' financial difficulties: Their salaries and benefits were cut down, and their pension plan was abolished.

The standard of inspection was universal; however, it was evident that the schools in poor districts were hit the hardest by the Code. Manning (1959/2021) notes that in 1861, 189 out of the 192 schools of the London Ragged School Union failed to acquire a grant (p. 21). Dickens's portrayal of Headstone in *Our Mutual Friend* captures this tension. He suffers from the conflict between his social aspiration and reform-era insecurity.

Bradley Headstone and Charley Hexam

To discuss the realities of Headstone and Charley, a comparison between M'Choakumchild and Headstone is useful. M'Choakumchild is an unlikeable minor character appearing in only three chapters of *Hard Times*. However, Headstone is a central antagonist. His emotion is complicated—his love, ambition, and eventual violence suggest the heavy pressure caused by the education reform. His rigid self-control and class anxiety mirror the nature of those teachers

who were controlled by the state and underestimated by their social betters. M'Choakumchild's commitment to his pupils is not mentioned, except for brief questions and answers with Sissy. However, Headstone's relationship with his pupil Charley dramatizes the shift from apprenticeship-based training to mechanized professionalism.

Grass (2020) contends that in Headstone, Dickens masterfully illustrates his profound sensitivity to the psychological and social ramifications of the reforms (p. 38). Dickens's transition from M'Choakumchild to Headstone signifies a deepening concern with the training of teachers and the shaping or suppression of their humanity by teacher-evaluation systems. The following quote is to be examined:

> Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat and waistcoat, and decent white shirt, and decent formal black tie, and decent pantaloons of pepper and salt, with his decent silver watch in his pocket and its decent hair-guard round his neck, looked a thoroughly decent young man of six-and-twenty. He was never seen in any other dress, and yet there was a certain stiffness in his manner of wearing this, as if there were a want of adaptation between him and it, recalling some mechanics in their holiday clothes. He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, blow various wind instruments mechanically, even play the great church organ mechanically. From his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse, so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers—history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left—natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics, and what not, all in their several places—this care had imparted to his countenance a look of care; while the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait. There was a kind of settled trouble in the face. It was the face belonging to a naturally slow or inattentive intellect that had toiled hard to get what it had won, and that had to hold it now that it was gotten. He always seemed to be uneasy lest anything should be missing from his mental warehouse, and taking stock to assure himself. (Dickens, 1864–65/2000, p. 230)

Similar to M'Choakumchild, what Headstone learns as a pupil-teacher and while training college student is paraded. The repetition of "decent" implies that he is eager to adapt middle-class-like decency. The repetition of "mechanically" indicates that he unthinkingly memorizes what is taught. The phrase "a naturally slow or inattentive intellect that had toiled hard" means that he is burnt out when he becomes a teacher. The term "wholesale warehouse" suggests the commercial aspect of education (Grass, 2020, pp. 38–39). He sells his knowledge for a living. However, his business ends poorly because he fails to choose a spouse. If he wants to succeed in his teaching career, he should marry Miss Peecher or any fellow female teacher, similar to M'Choakumchild. Headstone's obsession with Lizzy signals his complexity: he is neither a teaching machine nor a middle-class-like respectable teacher.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, the evolving relationship between Headstone and Charley indicates the psychological and social consequences of the Code. Initially, they share a bond rooted in worldly ambitions and underclass origins. Headstone sees his reflection in Charley, a pupil-teacher desperate to climb the social ladder. Despite his modest income, Headstone financially supports Charley beyond the extent to which a head teacher would be required to, although it is not entirely altruistic. Until their fallout, Headstone is a father- and brother-figure for Charley. However, as the Code intensifies pressures on teachers, their relationship increasingly

destabilizes. Headstone's anxiety and stress reveal the emotional toll of the demanding education reform. Charley grows more calculating, distancing himself from Lizzie and eventually from Headstone. It is hinted that Charley would unstoppably realize his life plan, from the management of the school to marriage. His rejection of Headstone signals a generational shift: the pupil-teacher no longer respects the head teacher, and seeks autonomy and social ascent. Examine the following quote:

> 'I am going to be plain with you, Mr Headstone,' said young Hexam, shaking his head in a half-threatening manner, 'because this is no time for affecting not to know things that I do know—except certain things at which it might not be very safe for you to hint again. What I mean is this: if you were a good master, I was a good pupil. I have done you plenty of credit, and in improving my own reputation I have improved yours quite as much. Very well then. Starting on equal terms, I want to put before you how you have shown your gratitude to me, for doing all I could to further your wishes with reference to my sister. You have compromised me by being seen about with me, endeavouring to counteract this Mr Eugene Wrayburn. That's the first thing you have done. If my character, and my now dropping you, help me out of that, Mr Headstone, the deliverance is to be attributed to me, and not to you. No thanks to you for it!' (Dickens, 1864–65/2000, p. 756)

Charley is representative of a new generation of educators who are influenced by the principles of the Code, prioritizing results over emotional intelligence. Grass (2020) writes, "Explicitly and implicitly, the Code treated empathy and understanding as valueless enterprises" (p. 35). Charley's farewell to Headstone is indicative of this generational shift. When paraphrasing the aforementioned text in the present discourse, the intention is to convey the following: "I have become a teacher thanks to your assistance. However, by demonstrating academic excellence, I have successfully completed the repayment process. We are equals, and I no longer need to feel grateful towards you." Conversely, Headstone grapples with the psychological demands imposed by the Code, while Charley demonstrates a remarkable aptitude for adaptation, suggesting a promising trajectory for future success. However, Dickens's depiction of him is not as a triumphant success. Charley exhibits a lack of moral depth, evidenced by his internalization of the utilitarian doctrine of the Code, which supersedes familial affection and fraternal solidarity. He is regarded as a literary embodiment of the post-Code generation, a concept that has been overshadowed by the education reform.

Conclusion

In *Hard Times* and *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens offers a layered critique of Victorian education, shaped by the evolving policies of the 1846 pupil-teacher system and the Code. These reforms expanded schooling to the working class and optimized the education system. However, it ultimately narrowed the emotional and moral scope of schooling. Dickens dramatizes this trend through his portrayals of teachers and schools.

In *Hard Times*, M'Choakumchild embodies the early pupil-teacher system. He is a product of mechanized instruction, trained in facts but devoid of sensibility. His teaching reflects the utilitarian ideals of mid-century reform—rigid, unimaginative, and lacking emotional involvement. Dickens satirizes this system as the one that treats children as machines and crushes their personalities.

In contrast, *Our Mutual Friend* presents a more psychologically complex response to the Code, which tied the school fund to the pupils' performance and harmed teachers. Headstone is a tragic product of this system—disciplined, repressed, and finally killed. His obsession and violence reveal the psychological toll of a profession, reshaped by bureaucratic control and class consciousness. Charley is unstoppable and unswaying, like a teaching machine, representing the post-reform generation. Dickens's fiction is a powerful lens to view the human cost of education reform, warning that when teaching is reduced to metrics, both teachers and students risk losing humanity.

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