

Transcendental Education:
The Pedagogy of Alcott, Peabody, and Thoreau

By

Joseph Adam Johnson

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Approved

Dr. Robert Klevay
Thesis Director

Dr. Alan Gribben
Second Reader

Dr. Matthew Ragland
Associate Provost

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved son,

Joseph Mark Johnson

March 12, 2009

and

To my dear sister,

Elizabeth Ruth Johnson

June 19, 1989 - March 29, 2014

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and out of the other. Regardless, he remained vigilant in providing me with the intellectual and emotional support to get me to where I am today.

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Chapter 1 Ralph Waldo Emerson and Education in New England

When discussing Transcendentalism, one must begin by introducing Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), for it was Emerson's thought that led to the formation of the New England intellectual group and philosophical movement. Emerson was an unknown in the literary world until he published *Nature* in 1836. The book was well received and over time had a profound impact upon society as a whole. It was this collection of essays that served as the foundation for the New England Transcendental movement. Other key transcendentalists who were inspired by the collection included Henry David Thoreau, Amos Bronson Alcott, William Ellery Channing, Margret Fuller, and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody. This work will primarily examine the contributions to progressive education and the larger educational legacies left behind by Alcott, Peabody, and Thoreau. However, so that their transcendental ideals for education can be understood, the evolution in Emerson's own thoughts about education will be examined first.

Emerson's ideas about education shaped his Transcendentalist philosophy. In his essay, "Education," he wrote:

[t]he secret to Education lies in respecting the pupil. It is not for you to choose what he shall know, what he shall do. It is chosen and foreordained, and he only holds the key to his own secret. By your tampering and thwarting and too much governing he may be hindered from his end¹

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson on Education*, ed. Howard Mumford Jones (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), 216-217.

The quotation summarizes a major theme recognized by all later transcendental educators. In the same essay, he explains that the teacher's occupation is to "respect the child... Be the champion of his thought, the friend of his friendship, the lover of his virtue."² In addition, he asserts his attitude towards the narrow and limited curriculum of his time by stating that "education should be as broad as man,"³ moral, and "teach self-trust: to inspire the youthful man with an interest in himself; with a curiosity touching his own nature; to acquaint him with the resources of his mind."⁴ In addition, teachers must show their students respect, as well as demonstrate a high level of patience, humor, and sympathy.⁵ These themes served as important inspirations for later transcendental educational philosophies and methods.

Later members of the Transcendentalist movement were more practically involved in the field of education than Emerson—some became lifelong teachers, while others taught for shorter periods. As educators, they left behind a legacy that influences American education to this day. For example, Amos Bronson Alcott recognized the need for young children to take a break during the course of a school day in order to physically move about and play; thus he scheduled a daily recess for his students.⁶ He was also innovative in his promotion and application of creating physical comfort for students in his classroom. Another pioneer in education was Elizabeth Palmer Peabody. She advocated for kindergartens in the United States, which were unknown in the nation's schools at the time.

² Ibid., 217.

³ Ibid., 210.

⁴ Ibid., 211.

⁵ John P. Miller, *Transcendental Learning: The Educational Legacy of Alcott, Emerson, Fuller, Peabody, and Thoreau* (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, Inc, 2011), 24-25.

⁶ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture* (Lexington: Forgotten Books, 2012), 3.

However, it was Emerson in his humble Concord setting that acted as the first true lightning rod for Transcendentalist ideology. Emerson's philosophical ideals began to take root in his role as a Unitarian minister under the mentorship of William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), who, along with Emerson's best friend, Frederic Henry Hedge, introduced him to German philosophy. Prior to reading the German writers, Emerson studied the English Romantic poets Samuel Coleridge (1772-1834) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850), along with the essayist Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), as well as Classical and Eastern philosophers. An amalgamation of Romanticism, Unitarianism, Classical and Eastern thought, and the German Idealism of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Johann Wolfgang Van Goethe (1749-1842) helped Emerson to define his own personal philosophy that focused heavily on self-culture and individualism.⁷

Goethe's concept of *Bildung*, which translates as "self-cultivation," resonated strongly with Emerson. The strong drive for self-development emphasized the importance of education among the Transcendentalists, since education played a major role in the underlying theme of self-development.⁸ Understanding that aspect of Transcendentalism plays a vital role in articulating the educational theories that were later developed by Alcott, Peabody, and Thoreau. At the forefront of transcendental education was the necessity of developing the whole-child, which meant that the teacher needed to educate the child's mind, body, and soul together. Other commonalities shared by transcendental educators included teaching their students to find happiness by recognizing their own inner wisdom, helping them to understand the interconnectedness in nature, including female students of all ages, the rejection of corporal

⁷ Robert D. Richardson Jr., *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 102-107, 131-137.

⁸ Martin Bickman, *Minding American Education: Reclaiming the Tradition of Active Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003), 23.

punishment, introducing environmental and multicultural ideas, and lastly, focusing attention on the importance of the instructor's behavior. At the time, these were all considered to be radical ideas and could often result in difficult consequences for those teachers who embraced them, due to the fact that the majority of nineteenth-century Americans rejected the educational reforms that even remotely broke with convention. Nevertheless, the reform-minded educators knew that their various teaching strategies were valuable in the classroom. As time went on, more teachers and districts embraced elements of transcendental pedagogy and the effectiveness of these strategies and methods would be tested and confirmed by later researchers, teachers, and universities around the world.

Unlike Alcott, Thoreau, and Peabody, Emerson spent little time formally teaching in a school. His experience in the teaching profession consisted of part-time summer teaching jobs while he was a student at Harvard University. To account for his dislike for teaching as a young man, according to Samuel A. Schreiner, Emerson was very shy, had low self-esteem, and upon graduating college he found that he "had no taste for teaching."⁹ However, he would later become one of America's most renowned lecturers despite not officially pursuing a career in childhood education. It is important to acknowledge that through his sermons as a Unitarian minister and later writings and lectures, he was and will always be a teacher to adults.

Education is a reoccurring theme sprinkled throughout his lectures, poems, essays, and journals—even when it is not directly mentioned in the title. One lecture in particular that Emerson delivered at Harvard in 1837, later published as "The American Scholar," was described by Oliver Wendell Holmes as America's "Intellectual Declaration of Independence."¹⁰

⁹ Samuel A. Schreiner, *The Concord Quartet: Alcott, Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, and the Friendship that Freed the American Mind* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2006), 11.

¹⁰ Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1967), 115.

In this speech, Emerson offers a glimpse into the ideology that fueled later transcendental educators when he said,

[t]he scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be a university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another which should pierce his ear, it is, [t]he world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all.¹¹

Emerson's call for education was well-founded, particularly in public schools, for he saw numerous defects in the current educational system. Nevertheless, he also recognized the potential the young nation had for change in this system.

Through his writing and lectures Emerson offered several specific goals that educators should strive for in their classrooms. John P. Miller, the author of *Transcendental Learning: The Educational Legacy of Alcott, Emerson, Fuller, Peabody, and Thoreau* describes Emerson's first goal for educators as the teaching of self-trust.¹² The students must, at all times, trust in themselves in order to be effective learners. Secondly, the learners must experience an "awakening of the soul" and develop a healthy imagination. Next, the teacher must show the pupils the connection between facts.¹³ It is the educator's obligation to create a curriculum that connects the facts and presents them in a way that the student can understand their relevance. Otherwise, the education system will be flawed, resulting in the students' regression to mere memorization and recitation –which was the most common method of learning in the nineteenth

¹¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2000), 58-59.

¹² John P. Miller, *Transcendental Learning*, 47.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 24.

century. The use of a fragmented course design that focuses only on memorization and recitation remains a problem in the twenty-first century. At all levels of the curriculum, there is often little connection between one lesson to the next, resulting in fragmented bits and pieces of information, leading to the failure of the student to see the larger picture.¹⁴

Similar to Gandhi's statement about seeking to "be the change that you wish to see in the world," Emerson acknowledged the need for teachers to be righteous, sincere, good people in order to be effective in the classroom. Emerson says, "That which we are, we shall teach, not voluntarily, but involuntarily."¹⁵ Thus, the teacher must be fully committed to his or her life as an educator, both in and outside of the school. Emerson understood that lessons did not necessarily have to be taught verbally; they could be taught nonverbally as well, simply by the teacher's presence and actions.

Furthermore, in a journal entry dated September 14, 1839, he expresses dissatisfaction regarding the state of education and the methods used by educators when he wrote that "we are shut up in schools & college recitation rooms for ten or fifteen years & come out at last with a bellyful of words & do not know a thing."¹⁶ In the same journal entry, he goes on to explain that "we do not know how to use our hands or our legs or our eyes or our arms. We do not know an edible root in the woods. We cannot tell our course by the stars nor the hour of the day by the sun," thus highlighting the necessity of educating the "whole child."¹⁷ This journal entry is a perfect description of how children are adversely effected by a limited curriculum.

¹⁴ Ibid., 24-25.

¹⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 245.

¹⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011), 223-224.

¹⁷ Ibid., 224.

Equally helpful in understanding the educational and philosophical roots of the later transcendental educators are three titans in the field of education who influenced them as well as Emerson—Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Alcott was directly inspired by Pestalozzi and attempted to establish schools based on Pestalozzian foundations.¹⁸ Similar to the transcendental educators, Pestalozzi challenged the standard assumption that teachers should conduct themselves in an authoritarian manner and was a staunch opponent of corporal punishment as a means of discipline.

However, before further examining Pestalozzi, it would be logical to mention Rousseau first since Pestalozzi studied Rousseau, namely his book on education, *Emile; Or Treatise on Education* (1762).¹⁹ In fact, if we analyze the concept of recess that Alcott incorporated into his regular school days, it can be argued that it was ultimately inspired by Rousseau, for in *Emile*, he writes at length about the need to impose less physical restrictions on young learners.²⁰ Furthermore, Rousseau's idea that man was naturally good (also embraced by Pestalozzi) was a direct challenge to the Calvinistic background of the Puritans, the direct ancestors of the transcendental educators. Rousseau advocated for a "natural education," which recognized various stages of human development that should be taken into account when creating a curriculum.

In *Emile*, Rousseau uses Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and the adventures of the main character to explain how "natural education" works.²¹ Under extreme

¹⁸Ibid., 30.

¹⁹ Gerald L. Gutek, *A History of the Western Educational Experience* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1995), 191.

²⁰ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or Treatise on Education*, trans. William H. Payne (New York: Prometheus Books, 2003), 34.

²¹ Ibid., 168.

circumstances, Robinson Crusoe taught himself farming, tailoring, carpentry, and an array of other useful skills, none of which he knew prior to him being a castaway. Crusoe's education was Thoreauvian in nature, for everything he learned and mastered as a castaway was learned "by doing." *Robinson Crusoe* also highlights a common theme that the Transcendentalists recognized, that of inner wisdom. Crusoe had no teachers and little to no prior knowledge of the various tasks he accomplished. The skills and wisdom Crusoe obtained throughout his journey were brought out by circumstance and desperation – something the transcendental educators sought to mimic through various pedagogical methods.

Moreover, to better appreciate why Emerson and his fellow transcendental educators had such notions about education and why they felt reform was necessary, one must understand what rural school districts were like during the early nineteenth-century. As described in *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* by Carl F. Kaestle, in the early days of the republic, an excess of open, cleared land was not easy to come by, hence schools were typically constructed on the worst possible land available – land that could not be farmed, nor had any other useful purposes. These school buildings were frequently built along a highway or in a festering swampland, creating a dangerous place for children who often walked to and from school. Also, the physical structures of the schools were typically constructed out of logs or cheap quality boards. The school grounds were not enclosed by a fence or any other structure, nor did they have playgrounds.²²

The classrooms were equally inhospitable and uncomfortable due to poor construction and interior design. Inside these one-room schoolhouses, the classrooms, as described by Samuel R. Hall in *Lectures on School-Keeping* (1829):

²² Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780 – 1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 13-14.

[Were] cold, so that in the winter a part of the scholars must be very uncomfortable, or make constant disturbances by going by the fire. In others the chimney is defective, and the house is constantly filled with smoke. The seats and desks, in a majority of the school-rooms, are badly constructed, so that it is very tedious to sit in them. They are often so narrow as to make it impossible to write with convenience. The desks are usually put so far from the seat that the small scholars can scarcely write without putting themselves in a very uncomfortable posture.²³

To add to Hall's assessment, the backless benches for the students were constructed of hard wood and were built so high that the younger student's feet could not touch the floor, which resulted in their feet dangling uncomfortably for extended periods of time. Some of the early schools accepted students as young as two years old. Also, the benches designated for the youngest students were always closest to the fire, resulting in the students (some two years of age) having to not only contend with stress on their legs and sitting straight up on a hard surface, with not relief for their backs, but also oppressive heat from the fire.²⁴ The classrooms being extremely hot or cold can be attributed to the fact that in the construction of the schoolhouse, no thought was put into a choice location for construction. No measures were taken to use natural (or artificial) barriers to shield the school from the frigid winter winds, or shade the building from the intense summer sun.²⁵

Colonial and early republic curriculum in New England schools was a product of the Reformation and the sole purpose was to teach Christian morals and literacy so the masses could read the Bible.²⁶ In addition to teaching literacy, the early schools in the U.S. were fulfilling

²³ Samuel R. Hall, *Lectures on School-Keeping 1829* (Lexington: Leopold Classic Library, 2017), 29.

²⁴ Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 16.

²⁵ Samuel R. Hall, *Lectures on School-Keeping*, 30.

²⁶ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 449.

another role, that of religious indoctrination. Early colleges were quite limited as well in academic diversity, typically offering degrees in ministry, law, and medicine.²⁷ Following the Calvinistic tradition in New England that argued all men and women are born marred with original sin, teachers imposed harsh attitudes through even harsher pedagogy, resulting in strict expectations of the children and severe punishments for the students who exhibited any amount of spontaneity or individuality.²⁸

Not only was the atmosphere of the classroom and the curriculum defective in the early nineteenth-century schools, the teachers were equally flawed and unqualified. Haefner describes the teachers as “ignorant, boorish, and ill-prepared; sometimes profane and licentious; and usually inflated with a consciousness of authority over the children.”²⁹ Consequently, the poor quality of teachers and teaching was no surprise, as there was little to no teacher training. Bronson Alcott’s cousin, Dr. William A. Alcott, who was an educator and who worked towards installing systems to better train teachers, and in his book, *Confessions of a School Master* (1839) he explains that the teachers that received the little training their school districts provided, “generally had no opportunity of studying anything but the common and narrow routine of their native district schools.”³⁰ As his attempt to improve the teacher training programs of his day, Dr. Alcott says:

[t]he next effort was to raise the standard of qualification in the candidate. Hitherto, although it was no longer ago than 1828, it had only been required of teachers to understand spelling and reading and a little arithmetic; and to be able to write in a good

²⁷ Ron Miller, *What are Schools For? Holistic Education in American Culture* (Brandon: Holistic Education Press, 1992), 19.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁹ George E. Haefner, *A Critical Estimate of the Educational Theories and Practices of A. Bronson Alcott* (Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1970), 54.

³⁰ William A. Alcott, *Confessions of a School Master* (New York: Gould, Newman and Saxton, 1839), 56.

hand. As to grammar and geography, they seldom, if at all, been mentioned in the examination of teachers.³¹

Dr. Alcott's efforts were certainly needed. However, they only addressed the subject matter that the teachers taught. There is no mention of training the teachers how to communicate the information effectively, nor provide them with the skills to create their own classroom strategies and teaching methods.

Teachers had little to no training and were generally ill-prepared for the task of leading a classroom. Rural schools were one-room school house designed to accommodate roughly thirty students. However, given that there was a limited amount of available schools and no age minimums, as the need for work on the farms diminished, overcrowding was a problem in the rural schools during winter, when the classes would swell with students, sometimes numbering over seventy for one teacher in a very small building.³²

Also, due to minimal resources, students brought books from home, sometimes randomly selected as the only books available; often they had been passed down from generations. Thus, there was no cohesive set of subjects the class could work on together, nor was group work permitted. If the teacher was unable to maintain authority over the class, the atmosphere and confusion of the classroom could be quite hectic. As Theodore White witnessed while inspecting a rural school in Connecticut:

the teacher was mending pens for one class, which was sitting idle; hearing another spell; calling a convey of small boys to be quiet, who had nothing to do but make mischief; watching a big rogue who had been placed standing on a bench in the middle of the room

³¹ Ibid., 187.

³² Ibid., 14.

for punishment; and, to many little ones, passionately answering questions of ‘May I go out?’ ‘May I go home?’ ‘Shan’t Johnny be still?’ ‘May I drink?’³³

Respect and prestige was something teachers were not familiar with. John Matteson offers a telling image of teachers in the nineteenth-century by comparing them to Washington Irving’s Ichabod Crane, who tyrannically runs his own classroom and boards with the parents of his pupils.³⁴

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody toured many public primary schools while she was doing research to improve her own pedagogy. She referred to them as being dreadful places where children learn to hate school. Using her observations, she writes that the schools are “sad, heartbreaking scenes of youthful misery and terror, injustice and daily cruelty.”³⁵ Another classroom she summarized as a “hot, suffocating place...crowded and ill-ventilated,” where the children sat on “benches without backs” and were engaged in “long rote spelling lessons... [with] tedious periods of idleness in which [the students] had to sit up straight and not speak or fidget.”³⁶

As a result of the regressive learning environments and horrid conditions of schools, there was significant changes to the American education system during the nineteenth-century. The husband of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody’s sister, Mary, was Horace Mann. He was friends with several Transcendentalists, and also led the charge for education reform and was quite successful. He was the first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education and prior to that

³³ Theodore Dwight, *Things as They Are; or, Notes of a Traveler through Some of the Middle and Northern States*, (Harper and Brothers, 1834), 115.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁵ Elizabeth P. Peabody, *Moral Culture of Infancy, and Kindergarten Guide, with Music and Plays*, 1863, Reprint, (United States 2017), 106.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

an influential Massachusetts State Senator.³⁷ He recognized the flaws in the public school systems that included: “short terms, irregular attendance, bad facilities, shortsighted and penurious district control, poor teachers, insufficient supervision, lack of uniformity, and indifferent parental support.”³⁸ In response to what he deemed the wretched state of education, “he advocated better school buildings and less use of corporal punishment. He widened the reach of public schooling and elevated the status of the teaching profession through training institutions.”³⁹ Likewise, he advocated the promotion of uniformity in the classroom and a standardized curriculum.⁴⁰

Despite Mann’s friendships, liberal political leanings, and concern for the more humane treatment of school children generally, he ironically became the antithesis of what transcendental educators were advocating. Where transcendental educators called for holistic, active learning, Mann aimed to create “a network of schools that would transmit existing knowledge efficiently and uniformly to passive recipients.”⁴¹ Mann’s vision of education became what we now call “traditional education,” where social control, cultural uniformity, and discipline are higher priorities over moral and intellectual advancement of the learners. Instead, historian Clarence J. Karier summarizes, as a result of Mann’s reforms, school systems were to mold future generations into a population that shared “moral, economic, political, and social values ... a secularized Puritan society.”⁴²

However, during the nineteenth-century, Mann’s reforms were an improvement from what existed in the United States previously and one can argue that it was these reforms that the

³⁷ Martin Bickman, *Minding American Education*, 7.

³⁸ Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 106.

³⁹ Martin Bickman, *Minding American Education*, 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴² Ron Miller, *What are Schools For?*, 32.

American education system developed into an actual cohesive system, as opposed to small county district operating on their own. But, despite the institutionalization of education and the desire for its improvement, the system was and remains to this day extremely flawed. To this day, Mann's reforms still have an outsized influence on the American education system. While most people are unwilling to challenge traditional education, since it is so ingrained in our society and has become conventional, passed down from generation to generation, perhaps a solution can be found by looking back to the same time-period in which the system was first created?⁴³

Many educators acknowledge the defects with the current education system in America and are slowly developing solutions. Consequently, it is worthwhile to examine the practices and proposals of the earlier transcendental educators. The educational legacy they left behind, in many respects, helped establish the basis for the progressive education movement, which arguably suggests solutions for the flawed education system in America. Their legacy, should we embrace it today, includes holistic education brought on by the design of lessons and activities that requires the use of all the senses. They also promoted experiential learning, a balanced curriculum, community-based learning, nature-based learning, bilingual and multicultural education, supporting and bringing out the child's own imagination, thoughts, and ideas, class discussions, and continuing education that could potentially lead to a population of lifelong learners.

⁴³ Martin Bickman, *Minding American Education*, 5.

Chapter 2 Amos Bronson Alcott

Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888) was born in Wolcott, Connecticut on November 29, 1799 to a farming family. In this rural community, there was little opportunity for formal education. Most children's days were spent helping their families on their farms. Understandably, school was not a high priority for most people in this community during this time. Alcott's father was illiterate and seemingly only interested in farming, but the maternal side of the family offered more support for young Bronson's education.⁴⁴ Having a mother that was interested in educating her children proved to be invaluable to him, for he was a child with an almost unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Despite Alcott's eagerness to learn, his opportunities to go to school were quite limited. School days for Alcott were often sporadic because he was regularly needed on the family farm. Whenever he did find the time to attend, he learned little, since the quality of education was poor and the condition of the schoolhouse was also deplorable. Typically, the teachers were untrained, and their lessons consisted of rigid memorization exercises. The school rooms were often dark, dank, and uncomfortable. Additionally, books were expensive and scarce, which even made it difficult for the young Alcott to learn on his own. Yet his insistence on acquiring an education of his own encouraged him to amass his own private library. Through both the toil of farm life and his studies of the philosophical wisdom of Confucius, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Christian teachings of the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress*, his mind flourished, and he molded himself into a precursor and parallel of Emerson's ideal of an educator.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ John Matteson, *Eden's Outcasts*, 16-17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17-20.

Alcott's teaching career would prove to be quite turbulent; however, he remained persistent in his quest to educate and experiment in his classrooms in an unorthodox way. He confronted controversy and scandal at his most notable school, the Temple School in Boston, which ultimately ended his time as a classroom teacher. However, many years after these scandals, he reemerged as the superintendent of Concord schools and opened a school for adult education, the Concord School of Philosophy. In spite of the challenges he faced, a determined Alcott continued to view education as the highest calling in life and to believe that there was no greater profession than teaching.⁴⁶

Alcott's educational philosophy rested on three pillars – he felt education must combine the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. In the evolution of his philosophy it is important to note that although Emerson's influence was expansive within the Transcendentalist circle, Alcott was grappling with similar ideas towards education prior to meeting Emerson. Alcott was extremely interested in child development and his ideas on the growth of children was shaped by observing his own, as all through their childhoods he kept extensive notes on them in his journal.⁴⁷ Alcott's essay, *Observations on the Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction* (1830), describes his pedagogy and the various reasons behind his teaching methods. In *Observations*, Alcott writes “the primary want of infancy is enjoyment”⁴⁸ and that “his chief enjoyment consists in the free and natural exercise of his material frame.” The need for unrestricted movement is the appeal to the child's animal nature. This is the first of the four propensities of child development outlined by Alcott. The other three include the child's

⁴⁶ John P. Miller, *Transcendental Learning*, 29.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

“...affections, the conscience, and the intellect.”⁴⁹ All aspects must be addressed by the teacher for the learner to be successful. First, Alcott expresses the need to address the child’s “animal nature,” or physical needs, which he claims is “primary and paramount to all others.”⁵⁰ This formed the foundation for later instruction, for “encouraging the free and natural activity of the body, the functions on which intellectual energy and happiness depend.”⁵¹ Once the animal nature has been appealed to, the child’s mind and body is ready for conscience and intellectual exercises. Alcott’s later use of Socratic questions and conversations served as one of the most effective exercises in attaining the child’s optimal intellectual and conscience facilities. He explains that the components for later instruction, with respect to the child’s propensities must be taught with “interest, certainty, and love.”⁵²

Another important aspect of Alcott’s educational philosophy is his recognition that school is but one of many places students must receive an education. He strongly believed that young children must realize that learning occurs at home and as well as in the community. Furthermore, he was an advocate of what would later be called whole child education; the teacher’s lessons must appeal to the physical, intellectual, and spiritual nature of the child. Second, the lessons must be designed to draw out the wisdom and intellect of the child. This was in complete contrast to the traditional methods of the early nineteenth-century. Louisa May Alcott, Bronson’s daughter offered a short but informative description of her father in the role of teacher. She wrote “...we had lessons every morning in the study. And very happy hours they were to us, for my father taught in the wise way which unfolds what lies in the child’s nature, as

⁴⁹ Amos Bronson Alcott, *Observations on the Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction* 1830 (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.

a flower blooms, rather than crammed it like a Strasburg goose, with more than it could digest.”⁵³ Her description summarizes the foundations of Alcott’s educational philosophy – the drawing out of the child’s own wisdom in a manner that keeps the student happy and engaged.

In *Observations*, Alcott concludes that “all lessons should reach the mind in an intelligible and visible form” and that “infant happiness should be but another name for infant progress; nature, and providence, and instruction, cooperating in their influences to elevate and to bless the infant spirit.”⁵⁴ The purpose of his school (Temple School) and the role of the teacher was to draw out the inner-wisdom of the child. In *Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture* (1835), Elizabeth Palmer Peabody quotes Alcott as he offers his own ideal for both his school and himself as a teacher within it. He says:

We need schools not for the inculcation of knowledge, merely, but for the development of genius. Genius is the peculiar attribute of the soul. It is the soul, indeed, in full and harmonious play; and no instructions deserves the name, that does not quicken its essential life, and fit it for representation in literature, art, or philosophy.⁵⁵

Thus, Alcott’s teaching made use of both Socratic questioning and journal writing. These methods allowed for his students to contribute to either the conversation or their journals with originality by drawing on their own thoughts and feelings.

Alcott’s attitude towards children was different from the conventions of his day. Alcott viewed children as uncorrupted beings that carried a divine nature within. Martin Bickman

⁵³ Louisa May Alcott, *Louisa May Alcott: Her Life, Letters, and Journals*, ed. Edna Dow Cheney (Carlisle, MA: Applewood Books, 2010), 29.

⁵⁴ A. Bronson Alcott, *Observations*, 10-11.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Record of a School*, 17.

claims that Alcott was most likely the first teachers in America “to acknowledge that children might have anything valuable to say on their own, that their utterances were worth listening to in the classroom and then setting down in writing.”⁵⁶ The sincerity of Alcott’s interest in his students can be seen in his various classroom strategies. As described in *Record of a School*, by Peabody, Alcott used Socratic questioning to facilitate his students’ inner-wisdom. He would also give them daily opportunities to write in their journals and have them write autobiographies in attempts to encourage self-reflection and self-knowledge.⁵⁷

Alcott may have been the first to introduce such methods and ideas in the United States, but in Europe Swiss pedagogue and educational theorist, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) was advocating for a more child-centric approach to education that valued and encouraged individuality. His classrooms were designed to mimic the atmosphere of a home and the teacher was to have the maternal characteristics. Additionally, the lessons included activities that stimulated the students’ whole – mind, body, and spirit. Alcott was strongly influenced by Pestalozzi’s pedagogical philosophy. Furthermore, the two men shared a disdain for the educational strategies of traditional schooling, which were teacher-centric, set up only to have children memorize and recite facts. Pestalozzi “advocated a pedagogical reformation based on the child’s interests and needs.”⁵⁸ Pestalozzi approached education with the heart and mind of a Transcendentalist. He was influenced both by the science of the Enlightenment and the romantic ideals of Rousseau’s *Emile*. Recognizing the positive reception of *Emile*, Pestalozzi wrote *Leonard and Gertrude* (1801), a novel which imitated the format and style that Rousseau used in

⁵⁶Martin Bickman, *Minding American Education*, 51.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Record of a School*, 1-15.

⁵⁸ Gerald L. Gutek, *A History of the Western Educational Experience* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1995), 191.

Emile, Leonard and Gertrude was Pestalozzi's attempt to make his ideas about education widespread. Although a fictitious story, the book served its purpose in communicating the benefits of Pestalozzi's form of natural education. A common belief among the Transcendentalists and Rousseau was that evil was not a product of birth, or indeed, a natural trait found in human nature, but rather it originated in a person through environmental factors.⁵⁹ Given the importance of environmental factors, he advocated for schools to be designed to promote the health, wellness, and happiness of the child. Furthermore, it was the teacher's duty to respect each child's individuality and to facilitate the growth of his or her organic development.⁶⁰

The educational methods described in *Leonard and Gertrude*, such as education being “the surest means of securing both personal growth and social reform,” and that education should “develop man's natural moral, intellectual, and physical powers”⁶¹ resonated heavily with Alcott. Another appealing characteristic was Pestalozzi's ability to compare education with Nature. For example, as quoted in the scholarly study *A History of the Western Educational Experience*, Pestalozzi wrote, “The seed of a plant contains the whole plant. The seed will sprout and the plant will grow, but unless given proper environmental conditions in terms of moisture, light, and warmth, this growth could be distorted by a tropism.”⁶² Another point that Pestalozzi stressed is the need for balance in education, and he warned against the over-saturation of intellectual exercises. Instead, teachers needed to provide a diverse set of strategies in their lesson plans.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 193 – 194.

⁶⁰ Ron Miller, *What are Schools For?*, 76-77.

⁶¹ Gerald L. Gutek, *A History of the Western Educational Experience*, 194.

⁶² Ibid., 200.

Alcott's educational ideals were more refined by the time he opened the Temple School, in September, 1834 at the old Masonic Temple in Boston.⁶³ Prior to his arrival in Boston, he further studied the works of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coupled with his affinity towards Pestalozzian methods and his own personal philosophy, the study of Wordsworth and Coleridge aided in the refinement of his teaching philosophy. This led him to conclude that "[t]he crowning achievement of education lay not in the culture of the understanding, but in the perfection of the spiritual nature."⁶⁴ His quest in spiritual education amplified when he had the freedom to design his own curriculum at the Temple School.

Key features of Alcott's pedagogy were recorded by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody while he taught at the Temple School. Peabody, turned out to be a tremendous asset to Alcott and the school. Her daily record of Alcott's lessons which she later published as *Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture* (1835) provides a comprehensive guide to his pedagogy, with examples of his Socratic questioning, journal writing and autobiographical assignments, his unique way of arranging the desks into a semicircle, the use of images for visual learning, classroom management, discipline, incentives, and the interior design of the classroom. Furthermore, this book brought Alcott and the school high praise from the community.⁶⁵

To understand why Alcott invested his time and money into the physical design of the classroom, it is important to realize the condition of the school he attended as a child. The school house Alcott attended in Connecticut is described by Odell Shepard in *Pedlar's Progress*, as being "less comfortable, less sanitary, and less decent than the prisons of their day."⁶⁶ The school

⁶³ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Record of a School*, 1.

⁶⁴ John Matteson, *Eden's Outcasts*, 52-53.

⁶⁵ Odell Shepard, *Pedlar's Progress*, 128.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

“...had a single room, twenty-two feet long by twenty broad and seven feet high.”⁶⁷ The room was lighted by sunlight that came through one of the five small windows. There was a fireplace by the entrance that provided little warmth even during the cold New England winters. Due to the constant need for warmth, the air in the schoolhouse was smoky due to poor ventilation.⁶⁸ Shepard goes on to explain the layout of the room and provisions on hand for use. The teacher’s desk stood in the middle of the room. He typically had inkstands and quills, a few books, and his instruments for administering punishments (the cow-hide and ferule). Backless benches were arranged for the students to sit and the desks used were long planks of wood that the students shared.⁶⁹

Peabody, in *Record of a School* describes in great detail the layout and furnishings of the Temple School classroom. She explains that Alcott, realizing the need for space, chose a very large room for his class. She goes on to describe that in each of the four corners of the room where busts of Socrates, Shakespeare, Milton, and Sir Walter Scott. The room was lighted by the light from a large gothic window. Opposite the window sat Alcott’s desk, which measured ten feet long. On his desk was a small statue of a “child aspiring.” Behind his desk was a large bookcase and “black tablet” (or blackboard).⁷⁰ Strategically situated on the bookcase above where Alcott’s head is when he is sitting at his desk was a sculpture of Christ and on top of the bookcase was a bust of Plato. Maps and portraits were hung on the walls of the classroom. The teacher’s assistant’s table was across the room from Alcott’s desk, which had a “small figure of

⁶⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Record of a School*, 1.

Atlas, bending under the weight of the world.”⁷¹ Behind the assistant’s desk on a small bookcase were “figures of a child reading, and a child drawing.”⁷²

Furthermore, the student’s desks were arranged in a unique way, unlike anything seen in nineteenth-century American schools. Alcott arranged their desks in a semicircle, with his own desk forming the backside, to create an ideal layout for conversation. Conversation was a staple in Alcott’s pedagogy. The entire layout was meticulously arranged by Alcott to stimulate learning. The objective of the classroom design, as Peabody states in *Record of a School* is “the whole effect of the day seemed to be a combination of quieting influences, with an awakening effect upon the heart and mind.”⁷³

Books were important to Alcott’s curriculum. The books that were available, provided by Alcott and Peabody were the “*Bible, Pilgrim’s Progress, The Fairy Queen, Krummacher’s, Parables- English Translation and Edition, The Story without an End, Coleridge’s Poems, Wordsworth’s Poems, Milton’s Paradise Lost, [and] Quarles’ Emblems.*”⁷⁴ Regarding the books, Peabody wrote that “Mr. Alcott thinks that every book read, should be an event to a child; and all his plans of teaching keep steadily in mind the object of making books live, breathe, and speak.”⁷⁵ According to his students, reading was uncommon in other schools. He would read to the students as well and provide ample time for them to read to themselves. Considering many students were very young, some of the more complex books were read and discussed as a class. One example is Plato’s writings, from which “he read to them the allegory of the cave” and

⁷¹ Ibid., 1.

⁷² Ibid., 1.

⁷³ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 16-17.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 14.

about “the death of Socrates.” Both stories the students were required to explain to Alcott themselves.⁷⁶

As mentioned before, Socratic questioning was instrumental in Alcott’s pedagogy. This pedagogical technique was used to stimulate the student’s imagination and guide them in designing their own interpretations and thoughts on the various topics discussed in Alcott’s class. Socratic questioning was used by Alcott more often than any other strategy. This method was a systematic series of inquiries intended to help the students analyze a number of subject. Also, the questioning was a way to aid students in deeper thought and crafting their own original ideas. However, Alcott’s execution of this method of teaching had its flaws. As noted as a concern by Peabody, Alcott would use the questions to steer his students towards his own ideals. Whether this was intentional or not, it defeated the purpose of the exercise. The questions usually followed a standard formula. First, the students would sit on a semicircle. Next, Alcott would read a passage from any number of books or write a word on the blackboard to learn, or pose a moral question. Following the announcement of the topic of study, he would then commence with the questions; never offering an answer, but always responding with another question. It was the student’s obligation to discover the answer on their own.

Here is an example from *Record of a School* of both Alcott’s use of Socratic questioning and perhaps, unwittingly steering the student’s opinions. Peabody recorded Alcott’s questions and his students’ responses as follows:

How many of you are apt to trouble your parents about your dress, because you cannot bear any little annoyance, or it does not gratify the appetite of the eyes? How many Give way to anger? How many can bear an insult? Not one boy thought he could bear an insult

⁷⁶ Ibid., 18.

without revenging; and some expressed, that they ought not. Did Jesus Christ bear any insults? Yes. Did he return them with injury? No. But if you are insulted, you ought to return it with injury—so great a wrong is done to you! They were silent. Is it the law of the spirit, or law of the flesh, which makes you want to strike? Of the flesh. Which law is it that makes you want to speak harshly, when so spoken to? The law of the flesh. Did Jesus Christ revile when he was reviled? No. Did he strike when struck? No. Did he let his disciples fight for him? No. Why not? There was silence. What was in his spirit that prevented it? Love, said a little girl. ⁷⁷

The series of questions continues on about weakness, strength, and virtue, which Alcott ultimately shows as the ability to have self-control and a strong spirit to conquer the wants and urges of the physical being, thus performing the required maintenance for a sound moral life. Overall, the Socratic questions were effective and unlike traditional classrooms, allowed the students to engage in sharing their own ideas. By contrast, the only times students were allowed to speak in a traditional nineteenth-century class was usually when they were commanded to recite an assigned passage.

One must also note that Alcott was no slouch when it came to discipline. He saw punishment of misbehavior as a way for students to learn to improve themselves. He believed that “encouragement, sympathy, affection, and loving guidance” was the most effective way to spur learning and discipline among his students.⁷⁸ This was a stark contrast to the harsh practices of the day, where corporal punishment was the standard. Although Alcott’s class was unorthodox and the students had a little more freedom, Peabody points out that the students “soon found out

⁷⁷ Ibid., 149.

⁷⁸ George E. Haefner, *Educational Theories*, 63.

that Mr. Alcott, with all his mildness, was very strict.”⁷⁹ Peabody described his expectations for his students in the following way:

They shall come into school in perfect silence, and take their lessons without a whisper to one another; and this is generally effected, without his being obliged to send anyone out. It is very important to the quietness of a school that the children should not begin to play in the morning. If all intercommunication is forbidden until they are fairly interested in their lessons, much trouble is prevented.⁸⁰

Furthermore, while the students were at their desks to work on assignments or in a semicircle for conversation, they were expected to remain in complete silence, unless they were called on by Alcott to speak.

At times, Alcott’s belief that encouragement, love, sympathy, and affection as an incentive to foster optimal learning, as opposed to strict discipline seems more theoretical than practical. Not only was silence standard in Alcott’s class, but physical stillness and attentiveness were required of all his students as well. Ultimately, with regards to discipline his objectives were to break “very weak attention, [and] very self-indulgent habits,” and for the students to benefit morally by the constant awareness and practice of self-control.⁸¹ Another aspect of Alcott’s disciplinary methods was the need for the students to acknowledge why they were being punished and to accept whatever the punishment out of necessity. Alcott made the students aware of how misbehavior not only affected the teacher and the disruptive student, but the class as a whole and that the disturbance selfishly stole time away from his or her peers learning.

⁷⁹ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Record of a School*, 7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

It must also be said that Alcott did in fact use corporal punishment in extreme cases. Prior to administering any physical punishment, the student needed to consent and agree that the punishment was just. The blows were always limited to the student's hands and were never administered in front of the other students.⁸² Alcott believed that strict discipline was necessary in maintaining a highly efficient classroom. To avoid any confusion and to clarify his expectations, the first two months of school were devoted almost entirely to "preliminary discipline."⁸³ Each day during those two months he would spend precisely two and a half hours leading conversations on conduct. Furthermore, knowing that "the child is essentially an active being"⁸⁴ and the need to adhere to the child's animal nature, as a deterrent he created lesson plans that routinely changed activities that combined both mental and physical exercises and allotted time for a daily recess.

Another strategy Alcott employed in attempt to draw out his student's inner-wisdom was assigning written autobiographies. Prior to the students writing their autobiographies, they would read biographies. In *Record of a School*, Peabody expresses the importance Alcott saw in his students learning about the lives of other men from reading biographies. Also, he connected the student's daily journals to the creation of their own autobiographies. Thus, the assignment is presented "as a means of self-inspection and self-knowledge, enabling the writers to give unity to their own being, by bringing all outward facts into some relation with their individuality."⁸⁵ She also describes how this strategy is "also assisting them in the art of composition."⁸⁶ This lesson addresses the essence of Emerson's warning about the fragmented, disconnected state of facts

⁸² Ibid., 18.

⁸³ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁴ A. Bronson Alcott, *Observations*, 5.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Record of a School*, 193.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 193.

that children learn in school. Emerson cautioned educators against pumping the students full of facts that have no relation to one another. He advised that the curriculum must have a correlation between subjects to aid in a better understanding of the information.⁸⁷

Unlike the traditional teachers of his day, Alcott envisioned the ideal teacher as being a guide. He put little emphasis on the teacher's formal education and academic knowledge. For Alcott, a teacher's character and moral aptitude was more important. In *Observations* he describes the traits an ideal teacher should have as follows:

In him the infant mind should find the object of its imitation and its love. To a pure and affectionate heart, an unsophisticated conscience, and elevated principles of action, the teacher should unite an amiableness of temper, a simplicity of manner, and a devotion to his work, which shall associate with it his happiness and his duty.⁸⁸

He goes on to say that the teacher "should possess the power of reaching the infant understanding in the simplest and happiest form...free from prejudices and partialities."⁸⁹ The emphasis on the teacher's morals and character was ignored by school districts in the nineteenth-century.

As mentioned in chapter one, teachers were hired to maintain order and present facts through dry lectures and student recitations. Most teachers were untrained and unwilling to create lessons with high educational value. In the classroom, learning incentives were defined by force and fear of punishment, as positive reinforcement was essentially unheard of. Furthermore, the few teachers who would be considered qualified for the profession were treated no different than those who were grossly incompetent. Teachers had little incentive to improve, for there was

⁸⁷ John P. Miller, *Transcendental Learning*, 24-25.

⁸⁸ A. Bronson Alcott, *Observations*, 8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

little opportunity for advancement in the field. Lastly, teachers moved a lot, only teaching in the same classroom for a few weeks at a time, never there long enough to form trust and healthy relationships with their students.⁹⁰

Furthermore, the presence of the teacher was imperative in the creation of a home-like atmosphere in the classroom. Similar to Pestalozzian, in *Observations* Alcott says:

Infant happiness should be but another name for infant progress... the methods by which the principles and purposes of early culture are applied in the exercises of the school-room, are of the most simple and unpretending character. They preserve all the primary habits of infancy, as expressed in the nursery, and under the observation and affection of adjudicious and devoted mother at home.⁹¹

Like Pestalozzi, he acknowledged the importance in making the classroom represent a home and the teacher's ability to carry themselves like a mother – a unique approach during the nineteenth-century.

For all of his efforts and innovations the experimental school was short-lived, lasting only a few years. Alcott's literary ineptness led to the failings of the school. Riding the wave of success that *Record of a School* brought, in 1836 Alcott published a sequel, *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*. Unlike *Record of a School*, which was written and edited by Elizabeth Peabody, *Observations* was edited by Alcott. The book's transcripts included one particular conversation that was deemed inappropriate and scandalous; a conversation between Alcott and a young student on the conception of Christ. Upon publication, Alcott faced immediate backlash from the community, which resulted in many parents withdrawing their children from Temple

⁹⁰ Samuel R. Hall, *Lectures*, 27-29.

⁹¹ A. Bronson Alcott, *Observations*, 11.

School. As attendance diminished, so did his finances, forcing him to move his classroom to a smaller room below the Temple School and closed for good in 1838.⁹²

With little income, he was forced to leave the old Masonic temple and convert his own parlor into a classroom to serve his remaining students. Here, he saw some success as attendance rose. However, following the enrollment of an African American student, he again faced serious criticism from most of the parents whose children attended his school. Alcott was offered an ultimatum—dismiss the African American student, or else the parents would withdraw their children from his school. The latter occurred, for Alcott would not kowtow to the parents of his other students. In the end, Alcott’s class was made up of five students, of which three were his own.⁹³

Following the closure of the school in his parlor in 1839, Alcott’s educational career was postponed until nearly two decades later following his appointment as the Superintendent of Concord Schools in 1858. As Superintendent, he endorsed his old methods to the teachers in his district. However, as seen in Alcott’s annual reports, many teachers were using his old methods of pedagogy. In fact, some were engaged in the techniques that led to Alcott’s dismissal as a teacher such as his conversations with children. Alcott believed conversations to one of the most effective classroom strategies. He called for all of the teachers in his district to replace recitation with conversation and to make the art of conversing a subject of study.⁹⁴ He also proposed the publication of a multivolume anthology including all works by Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Channing, and himself on the topic of education. The anthology was to be called “Concord

⁹² John Matteson, *Eden’s Outcasts*, 77-79.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁹⁴ George E. Haefner, *Educational Theories*, 123-124.

Book” and was to serve as teacher’s guide. However, with the onset of the Civil War, the book never came to fruition.⁹⁵

Finally, later in Alcott’s life he would champion adult education by conducting lectures, organizing conversations around the country, and the commencement of the Concord School of Philosophy—a summer school Alcott created in the parlor of his family home in Concord. This school was designed for adults to continue their education. Here, although Alcott was not the lead teacher, he would have guest lecturers covering topics on Shakespeare, Dante, Plato, Goethe, Aristotle, and later of his fellow Transcendentalists who had passed, such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller. Following the lecture he would lead a conversation covering the various subjects from the lecture. He continued the school until his death in 1882.⁹⁶

Alcott’s educational legacy offers useful strategies that are timeless. He was an innovative educator who pushed the boundaries of his day. Perhaps, if Alcott had focused solely on education and education reform he may have added even more to the field. He was conflicted about the urgings from his Transcendentalist friends such as Emerson, to be an author. Also, Alcott witnessed the success of such books as *Walden*, *Record of a School*, and *Nature* which most certainly fueled his desire to be a successful writer. The splitting of his focus from education to literary success contributed to his failings, for it was the fame he gained from him being the main character in *Record of a School* and followed by his book, *Conversations* that ultimately pushed him out of the classroom, not his competence as a teacher.

⁹⁵ John C. Broderick, “Bronson Alcott’s ‘Concord Book,’” *The New England Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (September 1959):, accessed February 27, 2018, www.jstor.org/stable/363014. 365-366.

⁹⁶ Bruce Ronda, “The Concord School of Philosophy and the Legacy of Transcendentalism,” *The New England Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (December 2009):, accessed February 1, 2018, www.jstor.org/stable25652051. 578.

His use of Socratic questioning not only taught his students how to think critically, but also led to self-discovery and help to awaken their inner spirit. Journal and autobiography writing reinforced the student's quest of self-discovery. Additionally, the journals helped improve the student's writing skills and grammar. Another important characteristic of Alcottian education was the physical design of the classroom and the use of visual aids. The classroom layout provided the students with a comfortable place to learn, while the various pictures and the use of the blackboard were useful in triggering the student's imagination and as a reinforcement for the students who were visual learners.

Despite his flaws, Alcott's experimental approach towards education was not in vain. His attempts to make the classrooms more comfortable and his various strategies were made public in *Record of a School*. The Temple School was a unique piece of educational history that offers pedagogical strategies that any teacher can benefit from. In that school, he displayed the importance in respecting children and acknowledging that they have their own thoughts and feelings to share – they are not mere robots there to obey and absorb facts.

Chapter 3 Elizabeth Palmer Peabody

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (1804-1894) was a part of the New England Transcendentalist movement and a close friend to Ralph Waldo Emerson. She devoted her life to teaching and education reform. Her educational philosophy was similar to her friend and one-time colleague, Bronson Alcott. Like Alcott, she believed that education should not be limited to intellectual exercises, but rather ought to aid in drawing out the student’s imagination, intuition, and self-discovery. Another similarity to Alcott was her high regard for children, since she, like many Romantics—believed children “[possessed] inestimable gifts and powers...[,including] ‘a personal soul...pre-existing to the understanding of nature, and... a communion of sovereignty with the Author of nature.’”⁹⁷

In his biography, Bruce Ronda describes Elizabeth’s deep faith in the importance and power of education as that which “brought together self and society, history and the future, into one activity.”⁹⁸ In addition, she acknowledged that “education is a social practice... mostly occurring in the midst of others; it puts students in touch with nature and with the past, worlds beyond their immediate knowledge; it disciplines and structures their interior knowledge.”⁹⁹ In a letter she sent to her sister Mary, she says, “The education both of old and young has always been my hobby; indeed, life always appears to me as an education, and is more interesting in this view of it, than in any other.”¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth remained unmarried and childless her entire life, never wavering from her focus on the improvement of education.

⁹⁷ Bruce A. Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 307.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Theory of Teaching With a Few Practical Illustrations*, 1841, Reprint, (MI: University of Michigan Library, 2017), 7.

Her early passion for teaching was facilitated by her mother, Eliza Peabody, who converted the Peabody family's homes into schools. In 1804, the year Elizabeth was born, her mother opened a home school in Billerica, Massachusetts. The classroom in the home doubled as Elizabeth's nursery. Of this arrangement Elizabeth says: "There I was born in 1804—being as it were prenatally educated for the profession which has been the passionate pursuit of my life."¹⁰¹ She literally grew up in the classroom that she would later attend as a student in 1812. While Elizabeth was a student, Eliza noticed her daughter had an immense desire for knowledge, as well as a flawless, almost photographic, memory.¹⁰² Her mother's school curriculum for older pupils focused primarily on history and literature, while the younger students studied writing, arithmetic, and geography. The required reading books for class included the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, sections of Tasso's *Jerusalem*, Chaucer, and Spenser, as well as Goldsmith's histories.¹⁰³

During this time, girls traditionally received a very basic education, consisting of training for domestic chores, deportment, music, and sewing. Consequently, aspiring young female scholars seeking a life of self-reliance had little opportunity to gain the vocational skills or college preparation that their male contemporaries had. Elizabeth was fortunate to be enrolled at her mother's school, for the curriculum was not based on typical nineteenth-century gender expectations. A similar gender-neutral curriculum would be modeled by Elizabeth in her own schools, as well as other innovative techniques introduced to her by her mother such as "dramatic readings, lively conversations, and inventive writing exercises."¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth's early pedagogy was also greatly influenced by William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) and later Friedrich Froebel

¹⁰¹ Bruce Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 38.

¹⁰² Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters*, 70-72.

¹⁰³ Bruce Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 41.

¹⁰⁴ Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters*, 82.

(1782-1852). Channing aided her in the creation of her personal ideology and her pedagogy, which revolved around the core principles of Unitarianism.

At the age of seven Elizabeth attended a sermon in Salem with her mother, where Channing was the guest preacher. The youthful Elizabeth was forever impressed by that sermon. The words Channing communicated were like no other Elizabeth or her mother had heard. Eliza took her daughter to the sermon to have the Calvinistic fear of God affirmed in Elizabeth. However, Channing's unorthodox thinking rejected her mother's faith. He asserted that humans were not born "depraved" and "sinful." Furthermore, he said that human beings in the eyes of God retained grace through "knowledge, love, and activity."¹⁰⁵ When this sermon was delivered, Channing had yet to declare himself a Unitarian, let alone—one of the early religious inspirations for Transcendentalism. Over time, Elizabeth became close friends with Channing, who served as a mentor. He exposed her to the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were friends with Channing and whose ideas were later important for Transcendentalism.¹⁰⁶

While her spiritual quest and intellectual pursuits both remained constant, as Elizabeth continued on her path to become an educator. Shortly after her seventeenth birthday, Elizabeth opened her first school in 1821. The commencement of her first school was out of necessity, as her family often struggled financially. She had five brothers and sisters in all, and Elizabeth's commitment to help her family was a characteristic that remained with her entire life. She regularly supplied a large portion of her income to her parents and, later, her siblings, and kept little for herself. In fact, her initial move from home in 1822 to Boston was an attempt to find a higher paying teaching job so she could earn enough money to pay for her brother's college

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 71, 162-163.

tuition.¹⁰⁷ The move to Boston was by no means against her will though, for the city offered cultural and intellectual connections she desired.

Elizabeth's career as an educator was profoundly altered in 1859, when she learned about the work of Friedrich Froebel. It was his work in Germany that influenced her to take up the cause of opening kindergartens in the U.S. In fact, one year later in 1860, she opened the first English-speaking kindergarten in the United States, in Boston.¹⁰⁸ The kindergarten was successful and brought Elizabeth great prestige. She applied Froebelian concepts to her lessons and to the design of the school. In her book *Education in the Home, the Kindergarten, and the Primary School* she describes a kindergarten as

A guarded company of children, who are to be treated as a gardener treats his plants, that is, in the first place, studied to see what they are, and what conditions they require for the fullest and most beautiful growth; in the second place, put into or supplied with these conditions, with as little handling of their individuality as possible, but with an unceasing genial and provident care to remove all obstructions, and favor all circumstances of growth. It is because they are living organisms that they are to be *cultivated*—not *drilled*.¹⁰⁹

Her curriculum included gymnastics, dancing, and singing, the manipulation of objects for instruction in arithmetic and geometry, moral and religious exercises, grammar, languages, reading, geography, and history.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷Bruce Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 50-51

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth P. Peabody, *Education in the home, the Kindergarten, and the Primary School*, 1887, Reprint, (Project Gutenberg EBook, 2011), 9.

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth P. Peabody, *Moral Culture of Infancy, and Kindergarten Guide, with Music and Plays*, 1863, Reprint, (United States 2017).

Friedrich Froebel was a German educator and the founder of the kindergarten. He was a student of Swiss educator, Johann Pestalozzi, who had inspired Alcott. Froebel revered Pestalozzi as a master in education.¹¹¹ However, Froebel identified a period in child-development that Pestalozzi put less emphasis on. A large portion of Pestalozzi's work relied on the child's *intuition*. Froebel focused on a period that he saw as prior to *intuition*, between the ages of three and seven when the child's raw unchecked emotions determine behavior and learning comes chiefly from sensory input. In a letter addressed to a friend written in 1829, Froebel explains his plan for "an institution for the care and development of children of both sexes from three to seven years of age."¹¹² The letter goes on to predict the formation of kindergarten when he says, "I do not call this by name usually given to similar institutions, that is, *Infant Schools*, because it is not to be a *school*, for the children in it will not be *schooled*, but freely developed."¹¹³ The foundations of kindergarten were to help the child to grow physically, mentally, and morally.¹¹⁴

As described by Bruce Ronda, Elizabeth's advocacy for kindergarten "reflected all the influences in her life and career: her mother's school and philosophy; the impact of Channing's affective Unitarianism; the Transcendentalist protest and larger Romantic ideology; her devotion to history; and her emphasis on the self in the social order."¹¹⁵ While her Transcendentalist contemporaries contributed several important pieces of literature, for Elizabeth "the kindergarten

¹¹¹ H. Couthope Bowen, *Froebel and Education by Self-activity* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, Publishers, 1970), 1-2.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹¹⁵ Bruce Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 307.

was her greatest work, her *Nature*, *Walden*, “Song of Myself,” [and] *Women in the Nineteenth Century*.”¹¹⁶

Her teaching career began in her family home in Lancaster in 1821, where she converted the parlor into her classroom.¹¹⁷ Elizabeth desired that her school break from the conventional methods of the day. In a letter addressed to her sister Mary, she explains that the mission of her school, which went on to be called the Lancaster Boarding School, was to “educate children morally and spiritually as well as intellectually.”¹¹⁸

The students of the Lancaster Boarding School ranged from ages ten to eighteen. Elizabeth wanted her school to break from the conventional methods of the day. For example, she did not use traditional texts books. Similar to Alcott, she regularly led discussions on various subjects. Her methods for teaching reading were unorthodox as well. Rather than following the norm of assigning dry and complicated books found in most curriculums, she required her students to bring books of their choosing from home to read. These books were used by the students to practice reading aloud and they also served as the basis for their spelling lessons. Furthermore, she substituted the standard practice of using slates to work out sums and memorizing multiplication tables for a new method of teaching mathematics using dried beans. The students would practice adding, subtracting, dividing, and multiplying the beans until they were proficient in every one of these functions.¹¹⁹

Elizabeth and her sister Mary later opened a school in Brookline, Massachusetts. It was here that Elizabeth began to incorporate her growing acceptance of Unitarian theology into her lessons. Channing’s influence can be seen at this point in Elizabeth’s career, as well as her

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 307.

¹¹⁷ Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters*, 107.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Theory of Teaching With a Few Practical Illustrations*, 53.

¹¹⁹ Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters*, 108.

leanings towards what would become Transcendentalism. She shared the Romantic belief that within children was a spark of divine spirituality and an intuitive connection to nature. Thus, her desire to draw out the inner wisdom became a standard in her pedagogy.¹²⁰ The curriculum designed for the Brookline school resembled both her mother's influence in maintaining a "rigorous intellectual curriculum"¹²¹ combined with Channing's "stress on character building."¹²²

An interesting strategy Elizabeth used for character development was that near the end of the school year she wrote a letter to each student describing to them the various character flaws she observed over the course of the school year. The students were given the summer recess to ponder the letters and come up with their replies – something Elizabeth herself feared! However, to her surprise, the students were receptive to the letters and were appreciative towards her for pointing out their faults. In fact, as a result of the letters, she noted that the overall behavior of her students improved dramatically.¹²³

As her pedagogy matured and became even more unconventional, questions and concerns arose from the community. Parents were skeptical about the teaching of morals in school and when they learned about her method for teaching English grammar, she was challenged by some parents. Rather than following the conventional way of teaching English by using "abstract labels and categories" she presented the "meaning and relation of words."¹²⁴ This led one father to question the effectiveness of the exercise, for he was unfamiliar with the strategy and did not approve because he was not taught that way when he was a child. In response, she invited him to

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 69.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

sit in on her English lesson the next day. The students were flawless in their grammar lesson and as Elizabeth writes in a letter to her sister as quoted in *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: A Reformer on Her Own*, the father said "...I had conquered his doubts and fears; that he had never passed a more intellectual hour, or received a more thorough lesson in grammatical analysis."¹²⁵

As to Elizabeth's classroom management techniques, she describes herself representing "...authority as an iron enclosure, bristling with points, which they will never feel, if they do not stray beyond the boundaries of self-government."¹²⁶ This description was way ahead of the times, for offering the students the freedom to self-govern would become a teaching strategy commonly used by future progressive educators—a technique that John Dewey championed by advising educators to use the concepts of a democracy in their classrooms. As for discipline and rewards, Elizabeth writes, "I have no punishments but depriving them of their favorite exercise or privilege. I have no rewards but more lessons. I allow them to speak to each other about their lessons, and to study together, if they do not disturb the recitations."¹²⁷ Thus, she strayed far from the conventional teacher-centric classroom, toward a more child-centric approach, another common feature found in later progressive education.

Elizabeth played an integral role in the formation of the Temple School. She and Bronson Alcott "were educational empiricists, grounding their teaching in experience, trying to give pupils as much firsthand engagement with the objects of study as they could."¹²⁸ Although Alcott was technically her superior and she his assistant, Elizabeth wielded the practical and particular knowledge on subjects that Alcott lacked. Having experience from her past conflicts with

¹²⁵ Elizabeth P. Peabody, "Principles and Methods of Education," *American Journal of Education*, 32 (1882), 724-725 quoted in Bruce Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 70.

¹²⁶ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Theory of Teaching*, 20.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹²⁸ Bruce Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 114.

traditionalist parents, Elizabeth was well versed in how to design a school curriculum that would appeal to the less radical inhabitants of Boston. Additionally, due to his lack of formal education, Alcott was weaker in subjects such as Latin and mathematics—areas in which Elizabeth excelled. Lastly, it was Elizabeth, through her friendship with Channing that had the best connections for student recruitment in Boston. As John Matteson notes, “by rights, if one were to consider only the raw abilities of the two, Alcott probably should have been Peabody’s assistant, not the other way around.”¹²⁹ Nonetheless, she accepted her role as assistant and did everything she could to enhance the quality of education the school had to offer.

Despite its initial success, the Temple School did not last long. And when the school failed, the relationship between Alcott and Elizabeth suffered. During her time at the Temple School, as part of her pay, Alcott had opened a room in his home for Elizabeth to live in. This arrangement led to some domestic issues between the two friends. All the while, the sub-par income promised by Alcott for her services at the school was rarely paid, thus causing even more tension between them. However, Elizabeth also came to have specific grievances and reservations about Alcott’s pedagogy. She realized that he was missing a major component of Froebelian education—the integration between physical and mental work. According to Elizabeth, Alcott failed to use the two strategies simultaneously: he would either have the students engage in intellectual exercise or physical exercises, but the two never combined into a single lesson. Furthermore, she did not agree with Alcott’s desire to have the students remain silent and motionless, unless told they could behave differently. She described his strict

¹²⁹ John Matteson, *Eden’s Outcasts*, 56.

discipline as “autocratic.”¹³⁰ Lastly, she objected to him exploiting Socratic questioning to steer students into accepting his own ideals.¹³¹

With the publication of *Conversations on the Gospels with Children*, Elizabeth distanced herself from the school and Alcott, leaving her position of assistant to be filled by Margaret Fuller. However, prior to the fallout between her and Alcott and the closing of the Temple School, she published her daily records of the things she observed in the school into *Record of a School*.¹³² As described by J. P. Miller, “*Record of a School* describes one of the first holistic schools in North America and is one of the classic efforts in progressive education.”¹³³ And probably the most complete record of Alcott’s teaching by a (at the time) sympathetic set of eyes.

Elizabeth’s most notable contribution to education came in 1860, with the commencement of the first English speaking kindergarten in the United States. Her whole life, up to this point had been preparation for the undertaking of creating a kindergarten system in the United States. In 1863 she published *Moral Culture of Infancy, and Kindergarten Guide*, which described the purpose of kindergarten, the physical layout of the room, curriculum, and lessons—a booklet essentially providing the blueprints to begin and effectively run a kindergarten. In this book she describes a kindergarten as “a garden of children, and Froebel, the inventor of it, or rather, as he would prefer to express it, *the discovery of the method of Nature*, meant to symbolize by the name the spirit and plan of treatment.”¹³⁴ She goes on to write, “How does the gardener treat his plants? He studies their individual natures, and puts them into such

¹³⁰ Bruce Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 118.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 117-120.

¹³² John Matteson, *Eden’s Outcasts*, 76-81.

¹³³ J.P. Miller, *Transcendental Learning*, 79.

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Moral Culture*, 10.

circumstances of soil and atmosphere as enable them to grow, flower, and bring forth fruit,— also to renew their manifestation year after year.”¹³⁵ The emphasis on recognizing each child’s individual nature is crucial.

However, this does not mean she advocated complete and undisputed freedom in the kindergarten, nor “are they to be forced against their individual natures.”¹³⁶ She writes that the teacher must not leave the children “to grow wild,”¹³⁷ but rather “prunes redundancies, removes destructive worms and bugs from their leaves and stems, and weeds from their vicinity— carefully watching to learn what peculiar insects afflict what particular plants, and how the former can be destroyed without injuring the vitality of the latter.”¹³⁸ Also, to attain a better understanding of her analogous plan, she advises “every school-teacher in the land [to] have a garden of flowers and fruits to cultivate.”¹³⁹

It must be noted that despite her optimism in children and the kindergarten, she did not naively believe that all children would blossom into little flowers under all conditions. She acknowledged the complexities in child development. She writes that “human nature tends to revolve around a vicious circle, around idiosyncrasy; and children must have over them, in the person of a wise and careful teacher, a power which shall deal with them as God deals with the mature.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, order must be maintained at all times in the classroom. However, organized “romping” and planned play “prevents the little creatures from hurting each other.”¹⁴¹ Engaging the children in physical activities appeals to what Alcott referred to as the child’s “animal

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

nature.” Although, unlike Alcott, Elizabeth adapted her lessons to assimilate both physical and mental exercises into one lesson.

In doing so, she made use of singing, dancing, plays, and the impersonation of animals. All of these activities are “intellectual exercises; for to do anything whatever with a thought beforehand, develops the mind or quickens intelligence; and thought of this kind does not tax intellect, or check physical development.”¹⁴² Another activity Elizabeth highlights is block-building. Due to the children’s extensive imaginations, she writes “blocks will serve as symbols of everything in Nature.”¹⁴³ Additionally, mathematic lessons can be included in lessons designed with blocks, for she would have the children first, count them. However, she concludes that the great value in having the children use blocks is that they are getting “into the habit of representing something they have thought by an outward symbol. The explanations they are always eager to give, teach them to express themselves in words,”¹⁴⁴ consequently, expanding their vocabulary.

In *Moral Culture of Infancy, and Kindergarten Guide*, Elizabeth writes that it is imperative for a kindergarten to be designed with ideally three rooms, but no less than two for lessons and activities. One room should be designated for quieter activities such as weaving, sewing, drawing, writing, and reading. While the other room should function more like a playroom, where the children can dance, sing, and practice gymnastics.¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth also embraced Froebel’s idea that every child should have an assigned plot of land to cultivate and grow their own gardens. They should have “accommodations for keeping animals, and miniature

¹⁴² Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 25.

tools to do mechanical labor of various kinds.”¹⁴⁶ Additionally, each child should have their own desk or box for storing their belongings. She even suggests that each child have their own section of blackboard for drawing and writing.¹⁴⁷ Considering that most classrooms had only one blackboard, which was designated for teacher use only, it is quite symbolic that Elizabeth proposes sharing the blackboard with her students. This further demonstrates her selfless commitment to the betterment of education and her ability to put the needs and well-being of the children first.

The ideal kindergarten curriculum should include music, plays, gymnastics, dancing, moral and religious exercises, manipulations (blocks, clay, and sticks), object lessons, geometry, arithmetic, reading, grammar and languages, and geography. Most, if not all, of these subjects are to be taught by integrating or alternating physical and mental exercises. Also, different subjects should be taught in the same lesson. For example, Elizabeth suggests geography, geometry, and drawing can be learned by assigning the children to draw maps.¹⁴⁸ It should also be noted that despite her advocacy for the use of intellectual and physical lessons, the teacher, at some point throughout the school day must include passive lessons—a time when the teacher is the center of attention. For example, a time when the children listen to the teacher read or tell a story.¹⁴⁹

Discipline in the kindergartens can be difficult at times due to the diverse nature of children. Elizabeth’s philosophy is that most children have a strong desire to be loved, nurtured, respected, and appreciated. Thus, as a preventative measure in maintaining a well-disciplined class, the teacher must be obliged in treating each child with love, respect, and appreciation.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-27.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

Another critical practice in the maintenance of well-behaved children is keeping them busy with intellectual activities, while allowing their bodies to physically move times throughout the school day.¹⁵⁰ However, some children are still inclined to misbehave. In these cases other disciplinary actions must be taken, such as informing a parent on the matter. Despite Elizabeth's objection to the use of corporal punishment, she knew that calling on a parent about a student's misbehavior in class would usually result in the parent carrying out such a punishment. The student knew this as well, so simply threatening to involve a parent usually was effective in thwarting behavior problems.¹⁵¹

Unlike Froebel, who believed the kindergarten served as an extension of the nursery, Elizabeth, who saw kindergarten fill an even larger role, that of an extended home—a place where wayward urban children and the children of immigrants can leave the streets to enter a place of safety, comfort, and imagination. The children from poorer families and those who are referred to today as “latch-key” kids now had a place to go while their parents worked. Elizabeth concluded that rather than children being exposed to the potential evils of the streets, the kindergarten “immersed children into the stream of society and history, without which they were, as she said, “depraved beings.”¹⁵²

Although the kindergarten is Elizabeth's most notable achievement, later in her life around the age of eighty, she used her public influence and connections to help Sarah Winnemucca open a school for the Paiutes Indians. In fact, to garner support on this matter Elizabeth interviewed then President-Elect Grover Cleveland, who devised a strategy to aid the opening of the school. The school was built in 1885 and was called “The Peabody Indian

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 183-184.

¹⁵² Bruce Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 309.

School.”¹⁵³ Her efforts in backing the Indian School led her to write a “booklet that advocated a multicultural and bilingual approach to education and argued against residential schools that took students away from their homes.”¹⁵⁴

A residential school was a government funded school that was designed to assimilate Native American children into a Christianized society. The schools were often administered by church officials who were white and oblivious of the culture their students came from. These schools were notoriously flawed and are now recognized as a state sponsored system for the indoctrination of Native children. The rationale behind such school was “for the civilization of the Indian tribes adjoining the frontier settlements.”¹⁵⁵ The students that attended the residential schools left their homes to live at the schools, which turned out to be a culture shock for the children. They were not accustomed to such an institution. For example, essentially everything the children would encounter at these schools they were unfamiliar with such as the building, food, required clothing, English language, and bathrooms to name a few.¹⁵⁶ Understanding the conditions of the residential schools one can understand why Elizabeth helped establish the Peabody Indian School. Her advocacy for multicultural and bilingual schools was unique for her time, for it was not until the nineteen-sixties that such schools became a serious topic in the United States. Prior to the Sixties, Native American children in both the U.S. and Canada experienced “various forms of abuse” as a result of residential schools.¹⁵⁷

Elizabeth died on January 3, 1894. Ednah Dow Cheney “eulogized her friend as a brilliant and loving teacher and a ceaseless advocate of the oppressed, in other countries and in

¹⁵³ Ibid., 332-333.

¹⁵⁴ J.P. Miller, *Transcendental Learning*, 82.

¹⁵⁵ Michael C. Colman, *American Indian Children at School, 1850-1930* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 39.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 79-80.

¹⁵⁷ J.P. Miller, *Transcendental Learning*, 86.

this one.”¹⁵⁸ To this day, there are tens of millions of children in the United States currently enrolled in kindergarten and each year approximately four million new students enter kindergarten.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, similar to Alcott, she was one of the first teachers in the United States that believed that learning must be holistic. Furthermore, the role of the teacher was imperative to the success of the students. Teachers must continually take notice in the changes of their students and adapt and adjust their lessons accordingly.¹⁶⁰

Lastly, her pedagogical legacy cannot be complete without mentioning the importance she put on making connection between information and facts in her lessons. This is why Elizabeth emphasized the importance of history, for it allowed her to present facts in context. She wrote to her friend, William T. Harris that “there is no *development* in the mind made by detached information—but things must be taught in *connections*.”¹⁶¹ Elizabeth advises teachers to make as many connections in their lessons as possible

All of the strategies Elizabeth used in her classrooms may seem rather common today. However, that was not the case during her lifetime. She was innovative in practice and in thought, always searching to improve her pedagogy. Her life is the epitome of an ideal teacher and her love for education infinite. The pedagogical legacy Elizabeth Palmer Peabody left behind is immense, from kindergarten, multicultural and bilingual education, holistic education, the use of concrete objects in her lessons, play as a method of learning, and stressing the importance of connecting information are all part of her legacy. After her death, Elizabeth’s friends, to honor her life, opened a kindergarten settlement house. The settlement house, opened in Boston, named

¹⁵⁸ Bruce Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 341.

¹⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Education, *A Matter of Equity: Preschool in America*, April 2015, 2.

¹⁶⁰ J.P. Miller, *Transcendental Learning*, 84.

¹⁶¹ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Letters of Elizabeth palmer Peabody: American Renaissance Woman* (Middleton: CN: Wesleyan University Press) quoted in J.P. Miller, *Transcendental Learning*, 85.

the Elizabeth Peabody House was designated for immigrant children and others who were unable to attend the public schools. To this day, the Elizabeth Peabody House is still operational, although it has been moved from its original building. The House is now located in an old church building in Somerville, MA, a suburb of Boston, in a working-class, multicultural neighborhood. On Sundays, the House serves as a congregational meeting place for Haitian immigrants, while the rest of the week there are after-school programs and daycare facilities.¹⁶² “On the main floor, next to the stage and above the battered piano, there hangs a faded portrait of Elizabeth Peabody, by Daniel Creighton, looking out over the fruits of her work.”¹⁶³

¹⁶² Bruce Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 343-344.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 344.

Chapter 4 Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was a naturalist, political theorist, social critic, writer, and a classroom teacher. However, as with Emerson, he spent little time in the classroom, teaching as an undergraduate while enrolled at Harvard and for a few years following the completion of his degree. Following graduation, as a teacher for Concord schools, he had many objections to the prescribed classroom management strategies he was obligated to implement. The unwavering stance the Concord school district held during Thoreau's tenure led him to resign from his teaching position and to open his own school with his brother, John. The brothers would name the school Concord Academy, and it was often referred to as the Thoreau's School by the townspeople of Concord. Unfortunately, the school that the brothers ran together did not last long due to John's poor health. Following the death of his brother and the closure of Concord Academy, Thoreau permanently ended his short career as a school teacher.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, for the remainder of his life, the topic of education would appear continuously throughout his written work, letters, and journals.

Given the information that is available about Thoreau's time as a teacher and the theories preserved in his work, we can learn a great deal about his own personal educational philosophy. Similar to other transcendental educators, he believed that children were born innately good, and it was the teacher's duty to facilitate and draw out the students' inner-wisdom and knowledge.¹⁶⁵ His contributions to education are the embodiment of what would later become modern progressive education. Similar to the other transcendental educators, Thoreau held the firm belief

¹⁶⁴ Ernesto Estrella Cozar, "A School for the Present: Educational Lessons from Thoreau's Journal," *The Concord Saunterer: A Journal of Thoreau Studies* 25 (2017): 92-127. 103-104.

¹⁶⁵ Walter Harding, *A Thoreau Handbook* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 158.

that education must teach the whole child—the body, mind, and spirit. The village of Concord served as his classroom. To fulfill his obligations as a teacher, Thoreau suggested and often times used such pedagogical methods such as field trips, informal discussions, care of pets, individualized instruction, nature walks, journal writing, swimming, and manual activities such as construction, woodwork, smelting, and navigation.¹⁶⁶

Furthermore, given Thoreau's love for literature and his brilliance as a writer, to him one of the most important subjects he taught was writing. He believed that writing was essential for the development of his students, as writing represented their thoughts and imagination.¹⁶⁷

Thoreau's methods for teaching writing are clearly described in an article by Mildred P. Hughes. First, Thoreau believed that topics should not be assigned, but rather the students should have the freedom to choose topics that they were interested in. Also, he was a strict critic of the students' work regarding the rules of grammar and would use grammatical errors as learning opportunities.¹⁶⁸

To effectively teach his students proper grammar, English-composition was split into two different subjects—when teaching “English [he] drilled on grammar and style; and when [he] taught composition [he] encouraged free and natural expression.”¹⁶⁹ In addition, he insisted that writing be generally autobiographical. Thoreau was more interested in his students writing their personal stories, drawn from their own experiences. To help his students create new experiences and observations to write about, he took them on field trips. Field trips also served Thoreau's idea that children must use all of their senses for learning and his learn by doing

¹⁶⁶ J.P. Miller, *Transcendental Learning*, 68-72.

¹⁶⁷ Mildred P. Hughes, “Thoreau as Writer and Teacher of Writing,” *The English Journal* 67, no. 5 (1978): 33-35. Accessed March 27, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/815657>. 33.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

strategy. Additionally, he believed that the best observations for writing occurred while using all five senses.¹⁷⁰ For example, spending time in the woods allowed his students to see, hear, touch, smell, and even taste nature, which allowed them to write more effectively on the subject. He also maintained that writing should be simple and that the students should write often. To encourage his students to write, they were assigned to record regular journal entries—a practice Thoreau maintained throughout most of his adult life. Lastly, to be an effective writer it was imperative for the students to learn to be self-critics.¹⁷¹

Henry David Thoreau was born on July 12, 1817 in Concord, Massachusetts. His father owned a pencil-making factory that would later employ young Henry David. However, Thoreau was not destined for factory work, as his family saw scholarly potential in the young man and despite their financial shortcomings, managed to send him to Harvard College. During his final year there, he read Emerson's *Nature*. This book had an extraordinary appeal to Thoreau and a lasting impact that would later influence his education practices, writing, and life in general. Having read *Nature*, Thoreau was inspired and became a very close friend with Emerson, henceforth becoming a member of the Transcendentalist movement. He would go on to meet and become friends with other members such as Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, Bronson Alcott, and Orestes Brownson.¹⁷²

While attending Harvard, Thoreau's family suffered from the high cost of his tuition. Fortunately, Harvard gave the students the ability to leave for a semester for various employments to earn money without the students compromising their academic standings. Thoreau seized the opportunity and traveled to Canton, Massachusetts. There he met Orestes

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁷² Laura Dassow Walls, *Henry David Thoreau: A Life* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 34, 39-40, 73-75.

Brownson (1803-1876), a Unitarian minister, who interviewed Thoreau for a job teaching at the local grammar school. Thoreau boarded with in the Brownson home while he taught at the Canton school and having shared many likeminded beliefs, they became close friends.¹⁷³ Brownson was working on his book, *New Views of Society, Christianity, and the Church*, which according to Laura Dassow Walls “joined Emerson’s *Nature* as a founding text of Transcendentalism.”¹⁷⁴ The process of writing Brownson’s book led to many conversations with Thoreau, many of which were on the subject of education. Coming from a poor family and having little access to formal education, Brownson was sympathetic to Thoreau’s predicament of having to work his way through college to pay tuition. Brownson’s belief that education “was the key to creating true equality... the *formation of character*, the moral, religious, intellectual, and physical training, [and] disciplining of our whole community”¹⁷⁵ certainly had an early influence on the young Thoreau. Later in his life, Thoreau referred to the time spent in Canton with Brownson as his “moral and intellectual birth, the day one’s life as a philosopher begins.”¹⁷⁶

Upon completion of his degree from Harvard at age twenty one, Thoreau moved back to Concord and was hired as a teacher at Centre Grammar School, the same school he attended as a child. Historian Dick O’Conner describes the school as being built to “warehouse” students utilizing amphitheater seating. Each side of the classroom seated forty students; one side for the girls and the other for boys. The teacher’s desk was raised sixteen inches off the floor and positioned in the front of the classroom facing the students (to look down on them). The

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

student's desks were bolted to the floor and the class was heated by a stove and the poor lighting came from oil lamps.¹⁷⁷

By a law established in 1647 by the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, grammar schools were to be established for any town that had one hundred or more households and the function of the school was to offer preparatory courses for college.¹⁷⁸ Included in the curriculum at the Concord Centre Grammar School were "Latin and Greek, general history, algebra, trigonometry, rhetoric, and logic."¹⁷⁹ Thoreau was tasked with teaching English grammar, geography, composition, arithmetic, spelling, reading, and writing, in addition to teaching his younger students how to make pens. Students were required to bring their own quill pens to class; these pens were only good for a few written pages, so there was a constant need for new pens.¹⁸⁰ Many students from higher income families brought their own quill pens, which were treated and imported, while the poorer students needed to make them at school. Also, students constructed their own writing books during this time as well.¹⁸¹ In addition to the curriculum and pen making, Thoreau was responsible for teaching the students morals, manners, respect for civil and religious institutions, and "love of social order and obedience to the laws; of supreme regard to virtue and the name and will of God."¹⁸² Also, Thoreau was responsible for instilling the consequences of "idleness, of profane and indecent language, of falsehoods, dishonesty, and inhumanity."¹⁸³ This overwhelming plethora of responsibilities resulted in Thoreau, of the sixteen other teachers at the school, to be the highest paid, at five hundred dollars a year.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁷ Dick O'Connor, "Thoreau in the Town School, 1837," *The Concord Saunterer: A Journal of Thoreau Studies* 4 (Fall 1996): 150-72. accessed April 4, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23392960>. 152.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

The academic calendar ran Monday through Friday, and Saturday mornings. The school days ran six hours a day and seven hours in the months of April through August. Holidays such as the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving were recognized, as well as election days. The school year was divided into four terms, by the seasons: fall, winter, spring, and summer. The typical school day began with the students, depending on their gender, either bowing or curtsying to the teacher before taking a seat. Once seated, the class would commence with a prayer, Bible reading, and a moral lesson for the day, followed by academic studies and lecture, and writing assignments.¹⁸⁵

Heating and cooling the classrooms were a constant problem, as well as lighting and ventilation.¹⁸⁶ As described in the article, “John Dewey: Educational Philosopher,” Kevin Ryan writes about the classrooms during Thoreau’s time as being “[p]oorly lighted and ventilated, the school buildings...resembled prisons.”¹⁸⁷ According to O’Connor, because the classrooms were heated with one stove and the windows closed to prevent the cold from coming in, smoke was a constant problem. However, the students were given two ten minute recesses for fresh air and exercise, once in the morning and the other in the afternoon.¹⁸⁸

As described in O’Connor’s article, classroom discipline in Thoreau’s day was carried out by means of corporal punishment. Teachers were to flog students that misbehaved. The instrument used was a ferule, a long stick made from hard wood such as mahogany or oak, and it was the students’ responsibility to make their own ferules. However, over time, a strip of leather replaced the switch (for boys), which in fact was more physically damaging than the wood. The

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 154-155.

¹⁸⁶ J.F. Santee, and Willard E. Givens. "John Dewey: Educational Philosopher." *The Phi Delta Kappan* 34, no. 1 (October 1952): 9-10. Accessed March 26, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20332263>. 9.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁸⁸ Dick O’Connor, "Thoreau in the Town School," 156.

female students were not permitted to be flogged with the leather strip, yet they were allowed to be struck on the hand with the ferule. Law forbade teachers from striking students with the hand and hitting a student's head was not permitted.¹⁸⁹

Thoreau wrote a letter to his old friend Orestes Brownson, detailing his views towards discipline, in this he writes that "education should be a pleasure both for teacher and student, and discipline should be the same in the classroom as in the streets; that is, not the cowhide whip but life itself... I have ever been disposed to regard the cowhide as a nonconductor...not a single spark of truth is transmitted through its agency."¹⁹⁰ He goes on to write that in order "to transmit that spark, the teacher should be a student, too, learning with and from his pupils."¹⁹¹

In spite of his objections to corporal punishment, the mandated form of punishment led to Thoreau's resignation from the school after a few weeks of employment, which in turn resulted in Thoreau beginning his own school with his brother, John.¹⁹² Thoreau believed that if the students were fully engaged in learning, there would be no need for any kind of disciplinary actions. However, if discipline was needed, he would engage the student in a conversation about morals and the implications that the disruptive behavior may have had on the class and the student, thus eliminating the fear of punishment and creating a better environment for learning.¹⁹³ Consequently, Thoreau's method of discipline was seen unfavorably by administrators, who insisted upon him using corporal punishment.¹⁹⁴ In response, according to William Ellery Channing, as told by Thoreau, to appease the administrators who were paying

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 156-158.

¹⁹⁰ Laura Dassow Walls, *Henry David Thoreau*, 95.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 95.

¹⁹² Dick O'Connor, "Thoreau in the Town School," 158.

¹⁹³ F.B. Sanborn, *Life of Henry David Thoreau*, 1917 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1968), 194.

¹⁹⁴ Dick O'Connor, "Thoreau in the Town School," 160.

him, he randomly selected six students to be hit with the ferule.¹⁹⁵ That same day after school Thoreau sent his letter of resignation.¹⁹⁶ According to O'Connor and other historians, another complaint about Thoreau's classroom was that the administrators in Concord concluded that it was impossible for learning to take place in a classroom with such high levels of noise and physical activity.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, they felt that it was imperative for students to adhere to strict classroom etiquette, which included complete silence, with the lecture being conducted by the teacher.¹⁹⁸

Following his resignation, Thoreau and his brother John opened Concord Academy, where John was the principal and Henry David was in charge of teaching.¹⁹⁹ Upon commencement, the number of students was exactly double to that of the teachers, which equaled four students.²⁰⁰ However, as the school's popularity grew, so did enrollment which soon peaked with twenty-five students.²⁰¹ Thoreau's experience in education up to this point in his life led him to be rather innovative with his own school and his pedagogical methods. First, he stressed the importance of the atmosphere in the school. For example, the classrooms were well ventilated. Also, he was a pioneer of project-based learning—a teaching method that will later become championed by John Dewey (1859-1952). Lastly, under no circumstance, were the teachers of his school to use corporal punishment.²⁰² Despite the avoidance of corporal punishment, an account from a former student by the name of Horace Hosmer, recorded in Edward Waldo Emerson's book, *Henry Thoreau: As Remembered by a Young Friend* (1917)

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 160.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 165.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 161.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 165.

¹⁹⁹ Lawrence Willson, "Thoreau on Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1962): 19-29. accessed March 26, 2017. . <http://www.jstor.org/stable/367333>. 19.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 19.

²⁰¹ Laura Dassow Walls, *Henry David Thoreau*, 97.

²⁰² Lawrence Willson, "Thoreau on Education," 19.

wrote: “[Thoreau’s School] was a peculiar school, there was never a boy flogged or threatened, yet I never saw so absolutely military discipline. How it was done I scarcely know, Even the incorrigible were brought into line.”²⁰³ The same student, as noted in Laura Wall’s biography, on one occasion when he was called up for misbehavior, “instead of punishment he came away with two new books.”

The Thoreau School gave the students many other opportunities and activities to learn by doing or learn from observations and experiences. Biographer Walter Harding writes that the school “was one of the first in our educational history to operate on the principle of learning by doing.”²⁰⁴ At least once a week the entire school went on a field trip that included trips to the local newspaper and gunsmith. Also, he regularly took his students on several excursions to the surrounding woods, ponds, and rivers.²⁰⁵ Writing in *Walden*, of the learning by doing method he asks “Which would have advanced the most at the end of a month—the boy who had made his own jackknife from the ore which dug and smelted, reading as much as would be necessary for this—or the boy who attended the lectures on metallurgy?”²⁰⁶ In fact, Thoreau was such an advocate of learning by doing that he went so far as to suggest that the students and teachers be responsible for building the schools and the universities from the ground up (see note below).²⁰⁷

Other innovative teaching techniques used at the Thoreau school was activities such as land surveying, boat repairing, and the cultivation of land.²⁰⁸ All of these activities served learning much more than any lecture could possibly do. In a late journal entry from 1860, he

²⁰³ Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau: As Remembered by a Young Friend* 1917 (New York: Dover Publication, Inc, 1999), 9.

²⁰⁴ Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1966), 82.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁰⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and other Writings*, ed. William Rossi (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), 38.

²⁰⁷ Kevin Ryan, "Henry David Thoreau: Critic, Theorist, and Practitioner of Education," *The School Review* 77, no. 1 (March 1969): 54-63. Accessed March 26, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1084336>. 55.

²⁰⁸ Laura Dassow Walls, *Henry David Thoreau*, 99.

wrote: “I think it would be worth the while to introduce the children to such a grove, that they may get an idea of the primitive oaks before they are all gone, instead of hiring botanists to lecture to them when it is too late.”²⁰⁹ In fact, Thoreau even displayed a level of skepticism regarding the accuracy of information attained through any lecturing at all. In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* he asks, “How can we *know* what we are *told* merely?”²¹⁰ This is just another affirmation of the necessity of learning by doing that Thoreau offers.

Perhaps the realization for Thoreau about importance of field trips and learning by doing in pedagogical design can be traced back to his time at Harvard. In *Walden* he wrote about a class that certainly would have been taught more effectively by way of a field trip. Of his navigation class at Harvard Thoreau writes, “To my astonishment I was informed on leaving college that I had studied navigation! – why, if I had taken one turn down the harbor I should have known more about it.”²¹¹ This quote clearly illustrates how the student would have benefited from actually being engaged in what he was learning (or not learning). First, he did not remember he had taken navigation in college and secondly, had he actually experienced navigating, he would be able to navigate a river, and perhaps remembered he had learned navigation at all. It was understood that in Thoreau’s “own school [students] took their ‘turn down the harbor,’ sometimes quite literally.”²¹² Despite Thoreau’s rather unorthodox methods of teaching for his time, “it was generally thought in Concord that a boy could learn more in a month with the Thoreau’s than a year elsewhere in the town.”²¹³

²⁰⁹ Henry David Thoreau, *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, Journal Vol. 14. ed. Bradford Torrey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 210.

²¹⁰ Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* 1849 (New York: Penguin Group, 1998), 294.

²¹¹ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and other Writings*, ed. William Rossi, 39.

²¹² Lawrence Willson, “Thoreau on Education,” 20.

²¹³ Kevin Ryan, “Henry David Thoreau: Critic, Theorist, and Practitioner of Education,” 60.

An example of Thoreau's multi-educational function of a field trip is described in *The Life of Henry David Thoreau*, written by fellow transcendentalist, F.B. Sanborn. He describes an account when Thoreau took his students on one of his field trips that he often conducted. The students took a river trip with Thoreau to learn physical science, culture, navigation, and history. Written by Franklin Sanborn, in this lesson, the students, after navigating to the shoreline, Henry asked:

'Do you see...anything here that would be likely to attract Indians to this spot?' One boy said, 'Why, here is the river for their fishing'; another pointed to the woodland near by, which could give them game. 'Well, is there anything else?' pointing out a small rivulet that must come, he said, 'from a spring not far off, which could furnish water cooler than the river in the summer; and a hillside above it that would keep off the north and northwest wind in the winter. Then moving inland a little farther...he struck his spade several times...his spade struck a stone...he set his spade in again, struck another stone, and began to dig in a circle. He soon uncovered the red, fire-marked stones of the long-disused Indian fireplace.'²¹⁴

This particular spot had been a fishing village for the Native Americans. Thoreau described the various functions of the land to the students and how the Natives made use of it.²¹⁵

Furthermore, staying true to his transcendental background, his underlying theory that education was best obtained in Nature, by using not only the head and mind, but also the hands—the use of all senses in learning. In *Walden*, Thoreau writes that "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front the essential facts of life, and see if I could not

²¹⁴ F.B. Sanborn, *Life of Henry David Thoreau*, 205-206.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

learn what it had to teach.”²¹⁶ Thoreau regarded Nature as a great teacher and attempted to open his students’ eyes to that. Thus, he held class out of doors, in the woods, meadows, and river shorelines. How can anyone learn while isolated from the world inside a building? In a late journal entry from 1861, he wrote:

A river, with its waterfalls and meadows, a lake, a hill, a cliff or individual rocks, a forest and ancient trees standing singly. Such things are beautiful; they have a high use which dollars and cents never represent. If the inhabitants of a town were wise, they would seek to preserve these things...for such things educate far more than any hired teachers or preachers, or any at present recognized system of school education.²¹⁷

Thoreau understood the value that the natural world outside of the classroom had to offer his students.

School for rural, poorer children was difficult to come by in Thoreau’s day. Because of this, Thoreau was a strident believer in universal access to public education. Under no circumstance, should any child be excluded from getting an education. In fact, he goes as far as calling the education of the youth a “moral obligation.”²¹⁸ In *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, he writes, “I maintain that the Government ought to provide for the education of all children who would be brought up, or rather grow up, in ignorance.”²¹⁹ If such actions are not taken by the Government to provide the means for obtaining an education, Thoreau argues that the community must “demand it!”²²⁰ In the same essay he writes that “it is much the duty of the

²¹⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and other Writings*, ed. William Rossi, 65.

²¹⁷ Henry David Thoreau, *The Writing of Henry David Thoreau*, Journal Vol. 14. ed. Bradford Torrey, 304.

²¹⁸ Henry David Thoreau, *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer and Edwin Moser, with Alexander C. Kern (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) 60.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

parent to educate, as it is to feed and clothe the child.”²²¹ However, if the parent fails their children in doing so, he writes, “should then poverty or neglect threaten to rob the child of this right ... in such a case, it appears to me to be the duty of that neighbor whose circumstances will allow for it, to *take* the part of the child, and *act* the part of the parent.”²²² Thoreau affirms that in an instance where both the parent and government fails a child, the community must assume the responsibility. He declares that it is a “moral obligation” to ensure that children receive an education.²²³

In addition to recognizing the importance of education, Thoreau would often be quite critical. The criticism came from a desire for improvement and a concern for those affected by the education systems, whether it be a lack of educational opportunities for the poor, incompetent quality of teaching. In one critique he writes: “What does education often do!—it makes a straight-cut ditch of a free, meandering brook.”²²⁴ Furthermore, he was critical of colleges and their faculties. Perhaps in an attempt to stimulate Thoreau’s genius and provoke a response, “Emerson once boasted that most of the branches of learning were taught at Harvard, Thoreau retorted, ‘Yes, indeed, all the branches and none of the roots.’”²²⁵ Of lectures and of other forms of auditory learning, Thoreau wrote, “can there be any greater reproach than idle learning? Learn to split wood, at least.”²²⁶ Thus, affirming his belief that active learning is the most effective way to learn.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

²²² *Ibid.*, 61.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 61.

²²⁴ Henry David Thoreau, *Uncommon Learning: Thoreau on Education*, ed. Martin Bickman (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 39.

²²⁵ Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, 51.

²²⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers 1849*, 85.

Thoreau acknowledged that in his hometown of Concord, there was a “comparatively decent system of common schools, schools for infants only,”²²⁷ but little to nothing for secondary and adult education. Additionally, he complained that the Concord library was small and unfinished, making it difficult for those people who wish to educate themselves. In *Walden*, Thoreau calls for villages to become universities, “and their elder inhabitants the fellows of universities.”²²⁸ He questions why “the world be confined to one Paris or one Oxford...?” Rather, Thoreau saw the potential value in Concord, which could in turn represent anywhere in the United States. Of his question about Paris and Oxford, he writes, “cannot students be boarded here and get a liberal education under the skies of Concord? Can we not hire some Abelard to lecture to us?”²²⁹

Similar to Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Thoreau acknowledged that there was a correlation between education, freedom, society, and democracy. He believed that education needed more funding and in *Walden* expresses his disdain for where the town of Concord invested most of its money, for most was being pumped into farmers and tradesmen, while the proposal for spending on education was considered “utopian.”²³⁰ In “The Last Days of John Brown,” he reminds the reader that in ancient Rome, only *free* men were worthy of a *liberal* education; “while the learning of trades and professions by which to get your livelihood merely, was considered worthy of *slaves* only.”²³¹ Given that the United States during Thoreau’s time was a slaveholding country, this quote eludes to the necessity in obtaining a thorough education in the fight against tyranny and slavery metaphorically, and most likely literally! In order to have a successful

²²⁷ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*, ed. William Rossi, 77.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

²³¹ Henry David Thoreau, “The Last Days of John Brown,” *The Portable Thoreau*, ed. Jeffery S. Cramer (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 552.

community and functioning democracy, people needed to be educated and continue their education as adults.

According to Thoreau, adult education was an essential part of life. Although his time as a classroom teacher ended after only a few years, he remained vigilant in his quest for knowledge and spiritual growth, as seen through his writing and his involvement with the Concord Lyceum movement. Martin Bickman points out that “[Thoreau] embodied—some even say invented—the notion of continuing education or lifelong learning.”²³² Thoreau remained active in the lyceum throughout his life and according to his friend and early biographer, Franklin Sanborn, Thoreau had lectured approximately twenty times before 1862.²³³ In a journal entry from 1851 Thoreau wrote:

We of Massachusetts boast a good deal of what we do for the education of our people—of our district-school system—& yet our district schools are as it were but infant schools—& we have no system for the education of the great mass who are grown up.—I have yet to learn that one cent is spent by this town—this political community called Concord directly to educate the great mass of its inhabitants who have long since left the district schools.²³⁴

This was not the only instance in which he expressed his disdain for the way local governments refused any funding for adult education. In a similar argument that appears in *Walden*, Thoreau declares that there are “no school for ourselves [adults] ...it is time we had uncommon schools, that we did not leave off our education when we begin to be men and women.”²³⁵ In the

²³² Henry David Thoreau, introduction to *Uncommon Learning: Thoreau on Education*, ed. Martin Bickman (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), xiv

²³³ F.B. Sanborn, *Life of Henry David Thoreau*, 47.

²³⁴ Henry David Thoreau, *Uncommon Learning*, 24.

²³⁵ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*, ed. William Rossi, 77.

conclusion of *Walden*, Thoreau writes, “I desire to speak somewhere *without* bounds...,”²³⁶ a sentiment which accurately depicts his understanding of education—a boundless service that should remain constant throughout life.

Along with being an abolitionist, Thoreau was a staunch supporter of social justice and individual freedom. In his writing, he clearly illustrates his desire for a life of complete personal freedom, free from the meddling of all institutions. The freedom he most wanted to encourage was the ability of people of all ages to grow as individuals. Consequently, Thoreau used inventive pedagogical methods to help his students develop their own individuality. As Ron Miller summarizes, Thoreau believed that “education should be the bringing-out or development of that which is in man’...—a true knowledge of one’s powers and one’s place in nature.”²³⁷

Although Thoreau’s overall educational philosophy shares many commonalities with other transcendental educators, some of his pedagogical methods were entirely unique to him. He was perhaps the first environmental educator, which currently has its own field at the collegiate level. His teaching methods also were a precursor to educational Pragmatism and John Dewey’s Laboratory School, which Thoreau foreshadowed in his own classroom by acknowledging the value of physical experiences.

In fact, Thoreau even applied his pedagogical practices to his own life, as seen through his experiential living at Walden Pond. Similar to having his pupils learn navigation by spending a day sailing down a river, when Thoreau wanted to learn about life, he went into the woods to live it. The Walden Pond experiment turned out to be highly educational and resulted in the creation of *Walden*. Although initially Thoreau’s experiment was to be a spiritual quest, guided by writing, reading, thinking, and observing nature, the first chapter, “Economy,” which is by far

²³⁶ Ibid., 218.

²³⁷ Ron Miller, *What are Schools For?*, 88.

the longest chapter in *Walden*, is a testament to the many different practical skills and knowledge he gained. For example, in the preparation for his time at Walden Pond he studied carpentry, agriculture, and masonry. Similar to Thoreau assigning his students to write their observations of a nature walk in their journals, in my opinion, *Walden* is just that; the record of a long field trip.

Thoreau's pedagogy must not be construed as overly child-centric and unstructured. While he placed a significant emphasis on physical activities and experiences, his classroom management and expectations were rigorous and immense. He did not frown upon "book learning" as some may suspect. In fact, Thoreau found a balance between traditional teaching and his more unorthodox methods. A former student of the Thoreau school, Edmund Sewall, in a letter to his father described a typical school day. In the letter he describes the use of traditional methods such as "reciting Solid Geometry...Algebra and Latin."²³⁸

Thoreau's educational legacy is invaluable and far reaching. The poor conditions of education during the early nineteenth century did not create disillusionment for him, but rather fostered ideas for education reform and new methods to apply in his classroom. He viewed education as being intrinsically valuable and imperative for a successful society. Furthermore, his theories and ideas helped shape educational theory into what we now call progressive education. As time goes on, more school districts are embracing progressive models of education. As the adaptation of more effective pedagogical methods and strategies like Thoreau's, the traditional "warehouse" method of education that focuses on the force-feeding and regurgitation of facts will likely become a page in the history books, while a generation of creative critical thinkers will rise and make the world a better place.

²³⁸ Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, 81.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

The overarching theme that is constant in transcendental education is the development of the self, or self-knowledge. Transcendental pedagogy was aimed at facilitating the pupils' journey of spiritual, physical, and intellectual growth. Furthermore, the transcendental educators strove to show each student how to appreciate their own thoughts and feelings to and recognize their intrinsic value as a person. In *Record of a School*, Alcott, in one sentence described the foundation of transcendental education when he said that “the object of this school was to unveil the soul.”²³⁹ He possibly regarded as the highest compliment to him and his school when “one of the scholars had said out of school, that it was impossible to remain in Mr. Alcott’s school and not learn to know one’s self.”²⁴⁰

In a time when the general goal of education was to mold the masses into a homogeneous, uniform society which unwittingly conformed to the calls of government, whether good or bad, the small group of transcendental educators challenged this convention. Unlike other educators in the nineteenth century, they emphasized individuality and self-worth. Each student was a unique individual that needed guidance rather than rigid discipline and rote lessons. Learning was valued over discipline. Their pedagogical methods were unique and effective—quite a contrast to the recitation and memorization, a staple of most current pedagogy.

Transcendental education is unique as it implements concepts and strategies from several different schools of educational philosophy, including: Idealism, Naturalism, Pragmatism, Experimentalism, and Progressivism. The Transcendentalists were also the pioneers of a lesser known educational philosophy called Holistic Learning. I mentioned some of the educational

²³⁹ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Record of a School*, 85.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

influences regarded by the Transcendentalists in earlier chapters which included Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel. However, I did not write much about those who were possibly influenced by and came after the transcendental educators. One example is Booker T. Washington (1856-1915).

Booker T. Washington implemented Thoreau's recommendation that the students and teachers physically construct their own school. The first buildings of Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University), founded in 1881 by Booker T. Washington were erected by himself and his students. In his autobiography *Up From Slavery* (1901) he described the benefits of such a task. First, he wanted to teach his students that the product of labor served more than a utilitarian purpose. As the chains of slavery were not far removed from African Americans and the horrors of forced labor still fresh, he wanted his students to recognize the "beauty and dignity"²⁴¹ in labor and to "learn to love work for its own sake."²⁴² Furthermore, Washington explained that the students' efforts in building the school would teach them "civilization, self-help, and self-reliance."²⁴³ In spite of being advised against such an experiment, Washington remained vigilant and after nineteen years, all but four of the forty buildings on campus were built by the teachers and students.²⁴⁴

Booker T. Washington's Thoreauvian educational philosophy was reinforced by the hiring of George Washington Carver (1860s-1943) to Tuskegee in 1896 to head the Agricultural Department. During his tenure at Tuskegee, Carver was responsible for the "movable school" concept. This innovation was a mobile classroom that made it possible for teachers to physically

²⁴¹ Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 1910 (New York: Penguin Group, 1986), 148.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 149.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

move their classrooms around. Similar to Thoreau's field trips, Carver came up with this idea to better educate his pupils while they were doing field work on the farms surrounding the school.²⁴⁵ The movable classroom is an idea that I feel confident Thoreau would have endorsed.

Arguably the most well-known progressive educator is John Dewey (1859-1952). John Dewey and the transcendental educators share many similarities in their educational philosophies. Moreover, given their understanding of child development, both Dewey and the transcendental educators acknowledged the need for a diverse set of lessons to accommodate the varied learning styles of the pupils. Furthermore, they recognized the role of a teacher as a facilitator and learning aid, contrary to the traditional pedagogy.

The power of education in shaping the individual was heavily ingrained in both Deweyan and transcendental education. To them, school was "a place where one gains moral training by having to learn to relate to others"²⁴⁶ and teachers must "appeal to higher cognitive process."²⁴⁷ Similarly, they shared the belief that education is a life-long process and "school is not something apart from life – it *is* life."²⁴⁸ Living life is educative and how to live it fully needs to be taught. Thoreau states that "they [students] should not *play* life, or study it merely, while the community supports them at this expensive game, but earnestly live it from beginning to end."²⁴⁹

In fact, while learning philosophy as an undergraduate Dewey studied Emerson's work. Of Emerson, Dewey said that he is "the philosopher of democracy"²⁵⁰ and that he "is the one

²⁴⁵ Lawrence Elliot, *George Washington Carver: The Man Who Overcame* (NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1968), 103-115.

²⁴⁶ John Martin Rich, "John Dewey's Contribution to School Discipline," *The Clearing House* 59, no. 4 (1985): 155-57. Accessed April 10, 2017. JSTOR, 155.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

²⁴⁸ J.F. Santee, and Willard E. Givens. "John Dewey: Educational Philosopher," 10.

²⁴⁹ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*, ed. William Rossi, 38.

²⁵⁰ Roger Lundin, *From Nature to Experience: The American Search for Cultural Authority* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 68.

citizen of the New World fit to have his name uttered in the same breath with that of Plato.”²⁵¹

Given that Emerson was part of Dewey’s studies and that he held him with such high regard, it is highly likely that Emerson and the other Transcendentalists had an influence on Dewey’s own philosophy.

Like the transcendental educators who were often scrutinized for their educational methods, Dewey’s pedagogy was also seen as being controversial. Some of his contemporaries described him as being with the “champion of ‘soft’ pedagogy.”²⁵² The notion that Dewey used “soft pedagogy” was a result of his refusal to use corporal punishment –something Peabody and Thoreau also avoided. Like the disciplinary actions embraced the transcendental educators, Dewey viewed the objective of discipline as being “positive and constructive.”²⁵³

As a child, Dewey experienced poor conditions at his school in Vermont, which recall those in Massachusetts described earlier. Like the transcendental educators, as a teacher Dewey was later conscious of the physical design of classrooms. He argued that schools needed to have various amenities for learning such as a garden, a kitchen, and laboratories.²⁵⁴ Also, the desks and chairs were to be moved around frequently by the students and pushed together so they could work in small groups. Lastly, the rooms needed to contain materials, appliances, and resources for the students to use.²⁵⁵

Other pedagogical similarities shared between the two are active-learning or learning “by doing” and believing that “experience is the best teacher.”²⁵⁶ In the summary of John Dewey’s

²⁵¹ Ibid., 68.

²⁵² J.F. Santee, and Willard E. Givens. "John Dewey: Educational Philosopher," 9.

²⁵³ John Martin Rich, "John Dewey's Contribution to School Discipline,"155.

²⁵⁴ Raymond D. Boisvert, *John Dewey: Rethinking our Time*, Albany (NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 104.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 104.

²⁵⁶ J.F. Santee, and Willard E. Givens. "John Dewey: Educational Philosopher," 10.

educational philosophy written by Santee and Givens, one can read with great clarity the similarities his thinking shared with the Transcendentalists. Santee and Givens write that John Dewey “believed in education as a means of enriching the life of the individual – as a means of helping the child to discover the talents with which he [or she] was endowed and to use those talents with greatest satisfaction...”²⁵⁷ In the article “John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education,” Phyllis Sullivan describes Dewey’s principles towards education as “not being preparation solely for the future, but rather living every stage of present development” and that “a child learns through ‘direct living’ and life.”²⁵⁸ Her summary is astoundingly similar to Transcendentalist ideals. Additionally, she goes on to write, “[e]ducation should provide conditions for growth not only in school but also in adult life.”²⁵⁹ Alcott and Thoreau strongly supported adult education. Thoreau was part of the Lyceum Movement and often scoffed at the lack of adult and continuing education programs during his day.²⁶⁰ Alcott opened the Concord School of Philosophy, a school solely for the purpose of educating adults. Lastly, although Peabody’s primary focus was on the education of younger children, she continued her own education until the end of her life.

Although Dewey’s educational philosophy and pedagogy shared many similarities with the transcendental educators, namely Thoreau, Dewey was missing a major part that the Transcendentalists held with a high regard:—spirituality. The pedagogical perspective of Dewey was the advocacy of “wholism,” or—teaching the “whole child.” However, as John P. Miller writes, there is a difference between “wholism” and “holism.” Holistic “implies spirituality, or a sense of the sacred, while ‘wholistic’ is more material and biological with an emphasis on

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 10.

²⁵⁸ Phyllis Sullivan, "John Dewey's Philosophy of Education," *The High School Journal* 49, no.8 (1966): 391-97. Accessed March 26, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40366240>, 392.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 392.

²⁶⁰ Kevin Ryan, "Henry David Thoreau: Critic, Theorist, and Practitioner of Education," 56.

physical and social interconnectedness.”²⁶¹ This is where the two schools of thought differ and why transcendental learning is superior. My intention is to not diminish Dewey’s contributions to education, but rather simply to point out that he did not include spiritual education as a part of his pedagogy.

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of many progressive educators and reformers, the state of education today remains similar to Horace Mann’s two misconceptions—that of standardization and compartmentalization. For this reason educational evolution remains relatively stagnant. The general population do not wish to be bothered by change and remain content with “traditional” practices. Hence, educational movements that could perhaps improve education remain suppressed and unknown to many in the United States.

Holistic education is an educational philosophy that remains relatively obscure to most people. However, some great minds have contributed to the development of its philosophy. Ron Miller connects such people as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, and Peabody as the pioneers of Holistic education.²⁶² While John P. Miller attributes the same people as Ron Miller, John looks even further back to the Greek philosophers Plato and Socrates, cross-culturally to the Russian writer and philosopher Leo Tolstoy, and even ideas from Buddhism and Hinduism.²⁶³

Holistic education grew out of a recognition of a fragmented world. The world, like the lessons in traditional schools, is fragmented and lacks any cohesion. Emerson cautioned against the fragmented course design and curriculum that plagued education systems during his time. Moreover, in *Nature* Emerson wrote, “The reason the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in

²⁶¹ John P. Miller, *The Holistic Curriculum*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 6.

²⁶² Ron Miller, *What are Schools For?*, 75-96.

²⁶³ John P. Miller, *The Holistic Curriculum*, 67-73.

heaps, is because man is disunited with himself.”²⁶⁴ Here he warns that people themselves are fragmented and disconnected. As John Miller points out, education has played a major role in the disconnect “between head and heart.”²⁶⁵

While Holistic educators identified the problems in education, they come up with specific goals that must be met. Thus, the objective of Holistic education is to:

consider in education all facets of human experience—not just rational intellect and responsibilities of vocation and citizenship, but also the innate physical, emotional, social, esthetic, creative, intuitive, and spiritual aspects of nature—are precious gifts which must be honored and cultivated if they are not to be lost and wasted.²⁶⁶

These objectives are met by a number of different pedagogical strategies. In John Miller’s book, *The Holistic Curriculum* he lists six connections that the students must come to realize. He writes that the first three, “subject connections, community connections, and earth connections,” all focus on integrated learning. The last three connections include “intuitive connections, body-mind connections, and self connections” which all relate to the development of the individual.²⁶⁷ Likewise, in their writing and pedagogy, the Transcendentalists acknowledged the interconnected nature of the universe.

One last person I would like to mention is Marietta Johnson (1864-1938) of Fairhope, Alabama who opened the Organic School, which is still in operation to this day. The Organic School was organized in 1907 to “meet the emotional, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual

²⁶⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, in *Emerson on Education*, ed. Howard Mumford Jones (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), 74.

²⁶⁵ John P. Miller, *The Holistic Curriculum*, 4.

²⁶⁶ Ron Miller, *What are Schools For?*, 75.

²⁶⁷ John P. Miller, *The Holistic Curriculum* (Toronto: OISE Press, 1996), 87.

needs of children, youth, and adults.”²⁶⁸ Like the transcendental educators, she sought to develop the “body, mind, and spirit.”²⁶⁹ Johnson asserted that “if education is growth, we are obliged to respect the inner movement and the thought of failure should be unknown.”²⁷⁰ Following her assertion, she asked, “What sort of school is it in which some succeed and some fail?”²⁷¹ Her statement and question both are at the core of a major flaw with education today. The system of labeling students as failures fosters a sense of self-consciousness and humiliation in the child that often leads to self-destructive behavior and apathy.

Transcendental pedagogy implements the most effective ideas of various educational philosophies to create the foundation of their own school of educational thought. This unification of pedagogical strategies has much to offer. We as a society need to evolve beyond the “traditional model” of education, which has morphed into what is now referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” In nearly every county in the United States, education is underfunded. Furthermore, to make matters worse, at the slightest sign of economic hardship, the education budget is one of the first to be slashed. This negligent attitude towards education is antithetical to progress. Even if schools were properly funded, that does not ensure that the quality of education would improve. Our whole way of looking at education needs to change. The Transcendentalists certainly saw the need to ignore conventional pedagogy and implement their own. Now, nearly one-hundred and fifty years later educators are faced with the same predicament.

Learning is no longer the goal of education. Teachers today are pressured by standardized tests that are designed to measure the students’ “progress.” Thus, teachers are forced to teach

²⁶⁸ Marietta Johnson, introduction to *Organic Education: Teaching without Failure* 1938, edited by Milly Cowles (Fairhope, AL: Marietta Johnson Museum of Organic Education) vi.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, vi.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vi.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, v.

their pupils how to pass that single test. These “Achievement Tests” are merely the new form of memorization-recitation that was required in the nineteenth century. Education plays a vital role in shaping society and visa versa. As Milly Cowles writes, the alleviation of most societal ills can be obtained through an education where “learners of all ages were placed in responsive, positive, challenging learning environments designed to foster feelings of self-worth, attitudes of confidence, and success.”²⁷² This is the environment the transcendental educators created is a model for teachers today.

It is unfortunate that traditional education has been the convention for so long. Sadly, tradition seems to suppress progress. Many schools of pedagogy have come and gone, or remain relatively unknown and limited to a single school. Dewey’s Laboratory School ultimately suffered a fate similar to Alcott’s Temple School: It closed because his pedagogy was considered too “radical.” Yet, as mentioned earlier, a student said that he could not leave Alcott’s class without learning something. Change is never easy. The deathblow to Alcott’s Temple School was his allowance for an African American student to attend. He may have been the first educator in the United States to racially integrate a school. Segregated schools would remain conventional for over one hundred years after Alcott. Peabody fought for an equal education for young aspiring women at a time when they were expected to be domestic servants. In addition, it was Peabody’s efforts that led to the United States’ kindergarten system, something that is extremely beneficial today. Thoreau was perhaps the first environmentalist, and he passed on his love of nature to his students – a time when respecting nature and having a regard for the environment was unheard of given the technological advances of the nineteenth century.

²⁷² Marietta Johnson, introduction to *Organic Education: Teaching without Failure* 1938, edited by Milly Cowles (Fairhope, AL: Marietta Johnson Museum of Organic Education), v.

Transcendental education is as timeless as *Walden* and *Nature*. As our awareness expands, so will our ability to understand the words and actions of Emerson, Alcott, Peabody, and Thoreau.

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