The Educational Thought of N. W. Senior: The Relationship between the Poor Law Amendment Act and Education[1]

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1. Introduction

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 (the 'New Poor Law') officially guaranteed the poor's right to relief, although this law also contributed to the creation of a free labour market by relieving prior restrictions. In addition, the New Poor Law was developed based on the House of Commons' Poor Law Report of 1834 (the '1834 Report'). At the end of the 1834 Report, the Poor Law commissioner said that the most important duty of the legislature was to adopt measures to promote the religious and moral education of the labouring classes after achieving further improvement of the Poor Law.[2] In fact, after the New Poor Law, the government began to intervene actively in education. In 1870, the Elementary Education Act was implemented. This law was the first act preparing for educational facilities by the government in Britain.

This paper focuses on the views Nassau William Senior (1790–1864) on educational thought. Senior was the first person selected for the Drummond professorship of political economy at Oxford University (1825–1830, 1847–1852). In addition, Senior spent several years acting as an economic advisor to the Whig party. As an economic advisor, Senior became a member of several commissions, such as the Poor Law Inquiry Commission in 1832–1834 and the Royal Commission on Popular Education in 1857.[3] Senior was the one to submit each commission's report. The 1834 Report was written by Senior and Edwin Chadwick (1800–1890), with Senior writing the end of the report.

The aim of this paper is to reveal the educational thought of Senior. Preceding research on this topic, including O'Donnell (1985) and West (1994, 2000), revealed the educational thought of classical political economists, including Senior. For example, West (1994) revealed the relationship between economy and education by using the 'neighbourhood effects' concept. Although West acknowledged Senior's contribution to child education, he mentioned almost nothing about Senior in his arguments. From Senior's viewpoint, education for children was a means to solve the poverty problem. Furthermore, Senior was one of the pioneers in compulsory education in England. For this reason, in this paper, we explain the education thought of Senior.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. The following Section 2 reveals the historical background of the 1834 Report. Section 3 explains the importance of

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[2] 1834 Report: 497.

[3] Furthermore, Senior was a member of the 1837 Royal Commission on the Distress of hand-loom weavers, whose report was published in 1841.

education for the Poor Law Commissioner. Section 4 explains the educational thought of Senior and Section 5 criticism of the workhouse school. Finally, Section 6 concludes.

2. Historical Background of the 1834 Report

Education for children in the early 19th century was provided by charity organizations, such as the Sunday schools of churches. However, as the industrial revolution proceeded, child labour in factories became a problem, which the government started regulating with the Factory Act of 1802. This law limited apprentices in cotton and woollen mills to 12 hours of work a day and specified that some part of the apprentice's work day be set aside for elementary instruction. Then, the Factory Act of 1833 more strictly limited the conditions for child labour. This law prohibited the employment of all children under the age of nine years and restricted children 13 years to working nine hours a day. In addition, this law required the attendance at school of all children aged between 9 and 13 years for 2 hours a day, 6 days a week. Furthermore, to ensure adequate facilities to carry out the legislation, Parliament voted in favour of a grant of £20,000 to support for the building of schools for the education of poor children. According to O'Donnell, this law 'marked the beginning of state involvement in British education'.[4]

This law was epoch-making for the education of children at that time. However, Senior also observed the crucial working conditions of children in factories. Senior was a member of the team that drafted the Factory Act in 1837. In a letter to Horner, he highlighted the importance of education for children.

Some economists highlighted the role of education before Senior. For example, Smith (Adam Smith, 1723–1790) highlighted the importance of domestic education. Smith believed that even the most worthless parent would provide better education for their children at home would a public school far from home. Smith said, "Domestic education is the institution of nature; public education, the contrivance of man. It is surely unnecessary to say which is likely to be the wisest.'[5]

Smith was an optimist about the education of children. Normally, common people, such as the labouring class, had little time to spare for education. Parents could scarcely afford to maintain their children, even in infancy. As soon as their children could work, they had to order to earn their keep. However, they could acquire elementary knowledge as follows.

> But though the common people cannot, in any civilized society, be so well instructed as people of some rank and fortune, the most essential parts of education, however, to read, write, and account, can be acquired at so early a period of life, that the greater part even of those who are to be bred to the lowest occupations, have time to

[4] O'Donnell 1985: 9.
[5] Smith 2003: 222.

> acquire them before they can be employed in those occupations. For a very small expense the public can facilitate, can encourage, and can even impose upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education. (Smith 2003: 990)

For Smith, education was a means to improve the moral condition of the inferior ranks of people. Smith thought that the state could obtain benefit by educating the children of the poor, namely, the public security of the state.

> The state, however, derives a considerable advantage from their instruction. The more they are instructed, the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which, among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders. An instructed and intelligent people besides, are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one. They feel themselves, each individually more respectable, and more likely to obtain the respect of their lawful superiors, and they are therefore more disposed to respect those superiors. They are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through, the interested complaints of faction and sedition, and they are, upon that account, less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of government. In free countries, where the safety of government depends very much upon the favourable judgment which the people may form of its conduct, it must surely be of the highest importance that they should not be disposed to judge rashly or capriciously concerning it. (Smith 2003: 994)

Therefore, the government started to support the early education due to the factory problem. However, the government just simply provided subsidies instead of directly intervening in education. And, although Smith admitted the benefits of public education, he never strongly insisted on its importance. Instead, Smith seemed to place importance on home education.

3. The Importance of Education in the New Poor Law

Before the New Poor Law was implemented, the Poor Law had come to be recognized as the cause of poverty. In particular, the allowance system, such as the Speenhamland system in 1795, was famous. This system, which is a form of outdoor relief, guaranteed paupers a minimum weekly income, whose level was determined by the price of bread and the size of the pauper's family.[6] Because of this system, the poor became increasingly unemployed, and the poverty rate increased year by year. In other words, outdoor relief had the aim of moral improvement of the poor. To solve this problem, the New Poor Law was established. One of its characteristics regarding the work of the poor

[6] Boyer 1990: 10.

was 'the principle of less eligibility'. This principle is 'that his situation on the whole shall not be made really or apparently so eligible as the situation of the independent labourer of the lowest class'.[7] Furthermore, under this principle, the pauper had to enter well-regulated workhouses, which were expected to improve the morality of the poor. However, although paupers were obliged to be less eligible, the education of their children was excluded from this law. Poor Law Unions were required to provide at least 3 hours a day of schooling for workhouse children, who were to be taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and the principles of Christianity, in addition to other instruction that might make them fit for service, and train them in the habits of usefulness, industry, and virtue.[8] On the other hand, in 1836, the guardians of the Bedford Union suggested a compromise by teaching workhouse children to read but not write. However, the Poor Law committee rejected this suggestion. The committee conceded the importance of the argument that the children of labourers should not be enticed into workhouses by the prospect of better education within its walls than they could obtain elsewhere. However, the education of poor children should be accepted for the following reasons. (1) The committee considered the inducement to enter workhouses would be counteracted by the distaste for the necessary restraints of workhouse discipline, and the fact that it was pauper education. (2) The commissioners were certain that in all cases, there would be schools accessible to the children of independent labourers that would be more attractive than any school that could be accessible only by becoming a workhouse inmate. (3) The commissioners considered it of the greatest importance that workhouse children should be so taught so as to give them the greatest possible chance of earning an honest and independent living of for the remainder of their lives, with the ability to write greatly increasing this chance. (4) Workhouse children should not be so treated in a way which could fix upon them any permanent stigma. All other children who learn to read also learn to write; to have acquired the knowledge of reading without the art of writing would become a distinguishing mark of stigma for the recipients of workhouse education.[9]

This argument between the Poor Law Commissioner and the guardians of the Bedford Union shows that the government acknowledged the importance of education for children.

4. The Educational Thought of Senior

4-1. The Purpose of Education

At the end of the 1834 Report, Senior concluded the report by appealing the importance of education. From Senior's standpoint, there was a relationship between education level and poverty. Education for children was a means for poverty solution.

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[7] 1834 Report: 335.
[8] Higginbotham 2012: 300.
[9] Second Annual Report on the Poor Law Commissioner 1836: 529.

Defective education was an evil of poverty which a government could palliate. Senior said as follows:

> Equally just is the compulsory education of his children, because it is the most effectual means of raising them from the condition of pauperism to that on industrious independence. (Senior 1861: 86)

Children could become the industrious labourer by schooling. Senior supposed that the industrious labourer was the person who had the 'abstinence'.[10] Abstinence was necessary to increase more wealth 'by using their products as the means of further production'.[11] In general, the worst educated were the least abstinent.[12] Furthermore, Senior considered that educational expense reflected labourer's remuneration. He said that 'the greater part of the remuneration for skilled labour is the reward for the abstinence implied by a considerable expenditure on the labourer's education'.[13]

Then, who should provide for the education of children? Senior thought that the government should intervene in the lives of people from the perspective of 'expediency'.[14] In the case of education for children, in addition to expediency, Senior acknowledged the duty of government to protect children, because children 'cannot protect themselves as well as those who can'.[15] For Senior, the cost of education was not an expense.

> The money so employed is much more than repaid by the superiority in diligence, in skill, in economy, in health – in short in all the qualities which fit men to produce and to preserve wealth, of an educated over an uneducated community.[16]

Therefore, to solve the poverty problem, the government should intervene in the education of children, because the cost of education could produce more beneficial wealth for the country. Unlike Smith, Senior considered that the effect of education was related to wealth.

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[10] Abstinence was 'a term by which we express the conduct of a person who either abstains from the unproductive use of what he can command, or designedly prefers the production of remote to that of immediate results (Senior 1836: 58)'.
[11] Ibid: 58.
[12] Ibid: 60.
[13] Ibid: 69.
[14] Senior, in Levy 1928 vol. 2: 302.
[15] Senior 1861: 6. Furthermore, continuing the next sentence, Senior describes the evils of uneducated or ill-educated children as follows. 'Now, the greatest sufferers from the negligence or selfishness which occasion the non-education or the mis-education of the children, are the children themselves. Their habits and their faculties, their utility and their happiness, are ruined by an ill-treatment which they cannot prevent and scarcely know.'
[16] Senior, in Levy 1928 vol. 2: 329.

4-2. The Definition of Education

Senior was strict about the definition of words. He defined education as follows:

> In the widest sense, the word *education* comprehends all the external influences by which the disposition implanted by nature in any animal is subsequently modified. In its narrower sense, it is confined to the influences which one person intentionally exercises over another by precept or by example.[17]

Senior provided a further classification of education as follows:

> Education is divided into teaching and training.
> Teaching is divided into the giving information and the giving instruction.
> Training is bodily training or mental training.
> Bodily training is the training the bodily faculties, or the bodily sensations.
> Mental training is the training the mental faculties, which is intellectual training, or training the mental sensations, which is moral training.[18]

Strictly speaking, 'teaching' is imparting knowledge, and 'training' is the creation of knowledge. 'Information' is the statement of facts which can be ascertained only by observation or testimony. On the other hand, 'instruction' is a kind of teaching consisting of statement, whose truth is ascertained not by observation but by consciousness or inference from pupils' previous knowledge. Furthermore, Senior divided training into physical training and mental training. First, physical training was divided into physical faculties and physical sensation. Physical faculties are trained by gymnastics or the acquisition of a physical art. Physical sensations submit to or resist the physical sensations of cold, heat, fatigue, or hunger and thereby weaken or strengthen those sensations. Second, mental training was divided into mental faculties and mental sensation. Mental faculties are, for example, attention, memory, and imagination, which are intellectual training. Mental sensations include fear, anger, pride, and other affections categorized as 'passions', which are moral training.[19]

In the case of education, training is the creation of habit. Most people define training as a habitual mode of acting or feeling. However, Senior pointed out the difficulty defining the word 'habit', occasioned by confusion between 'custom' and 'habit', which denote cause and effect, respectively. The frequent repetition of any act is a custom and the state of mind or body produced thereby is a habit. A custom forms a habit, and a habit maintains a custom. A custom is a continuous stream of similar acts. A habit is the channel carved by the stream. A custom ripens into a habit is when the customary act is performed spontaneously, or with pleasure, or when its omission has become

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[17] Senior, in Levy 1928 vol.2: 329.
[18] Ibid: 330.
[19] Ibid: 329–330.

painful. Aristotle defines virtues as habits. Therefore, he holds acts of virtue to be not duties to be performed but pleasures to be enjoyed. If such an act is felt as a sacrifice, the habit has not been acquired. The person who resists the temptation to steal has not the virtue of honesty. If he or she had, he or she would not feel the temptation in the first place.[20]

Senior considered that training was more important than teaching. It is more important even for the purposes of knowledge, because knowledge might be forgotten, and requires some trouble to maintain. Habits once thoroughly acquired cannot be discontinued without pain. Therefore, they are permanent. Even knowledge which has been forgotten, if it is worth recovering, will generally be recovered by a person of good intellectual habits. For Senior, the most important education is moral training. Therefore, training or the formation of habits, rather than teaching or the imparting of knowledge, is the great business of education.[21]

When Senior evaluated the content of education, he did so on the basis of the abovementioned background.

4-3. Education Target

Senior divided children into three types. The first type comprised children whose parents could afford to pay the whole cost of education. The second type comprised those whose parents or friends could afford to pay a portion of the cost. The third type comprised those whose parents or friends could not pay any part of the cost. Senior intended the third class as the target recipients of education. The first group was understood to be the higher and middle classes of a society. The second group was understood to be the labouring classes. The third group comprised paupers.

Senior thought it was not necessary for the state to interfere in the education of the higher and middle classes. However, he did not consider state intervention as useless. Senior meant merely to distinguish the higher and middle classes from those who were unable to pay for any part of the cost of a good education, and who must rely for such education wholly or partially on the care of the state, or the benevolence of individuals.[22]

Senior considered the educational cost for each class. The average income of an ordinary agricultural labourer was about 10shillings('s') a week. The education of a labourer's child costs at the lowest estimate, 6dimes('d') a week, or 26s a year, and at the usual estimate, 30s a year. In a labourer's family, children are servants who must work or earn money for the family. If they go to school, the family will lose money. A still greater sacrifice is that of child wages. A child was able to earn money from a manufacturer from the age of 6 or 7 years and from farm work from the age of 8 or 9 years. From the age of 9–11 years, the most important years of education, a child might earn from 1s. 6d. to 2s. a week from farm work in the country, and from 2s. 6d. to 5s. a

[20] Ibid: 330.
[21] Ibid: 330–331.
[22] Ibid: 332–333.

week from manufacturers in towns. If an agricultural labourer with two children aged between 9 and 11 years were to pay for their education at a cost of 1s. per week, in addition, the labourer would lose 3s. a week from their lack of wages, which would remove 4s. from the labourer's gross weekly income of 13s., or nearly one-third of the total. The burden, or equivalently, the loss in the case of the artisan, would be still greater, as in towns, the earnings of children were much closer to those of their parents. If there were two or three children in a family working, their earnings often exceeded those of their father.[23]

Senior accused parents of violating the basic rights of their offspring when they denied their children schooling because of the excessively high opportunity cost of education. Senior fostered the idea that just as a child had the right to food, he or she also had a right to education. Senior criticized parents who sent their children to work instead of school as anti-social. Therefore, Senior thought that the education of children could not be better managed by their own parents than by the state.

5. Criticism of the Workhouse School and the Recommendations of the District School

The New Poor Law was the first Act to provide for the education of pauper children. It directed the Poor Law Board to regulate the education of children in workhouses.

In line with this enactment, the Poor Law Board, by their consolidated order, Article 114, mandated the following.

> The boys and girls who are inmates of the workhouse shall, for three working hours at least every day, be instructed in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and the principles of the Christian religion; and such other instruction shall be imparted to them as may fit them for service and train them to habits of usefulness, industry, and virtue.[24]

However, public attention soon became focused on the evils of workhouse education, the badness of the workhouse masters, the contamination by the adult paupers, the absence of moral, intellectual, and industrial training, and the habit of quickly coming to regard the workhouse as a home and pauperism as an inheritance.

To solve these evils, in 1837, the committee of the House of Commons, which sat to consider the new Poor Law, and, in 1841, the Poor Law Commissioners published volumes on the training of pauper children. The committee decided to establish district schools, although only six were established in England and Wales by 1859. Senior acknowledged that the establishment of district schools had been practically inoperative. However, these schools had not failed. In the few instances in which they had been established, such as North Surrey District School, their success had been striking.

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[23] Ibid: 334–335.
[24] Senior 1861: 75–76.

Senior detected three obstacles to their establishment. First, the 11 & 12 Vict. c. 82, which required written consent from the majority of guardians of each union to combine school districts in cases in which any part were more than 15 miles from any district, as well as for expenditure on buildings of more than one-fifth of the annual poverty rate. The second obstacle was the 7 & 8 Vict. c. 101, which empowered guardians to send to district schools only orphans, abandoned children, and children whose parents or surviving parent or guardian so consented. The third obstacle was the absence of any department expressly and imperatively charged with the duty of endeavouring to effect the objects of the acts.[25]

Senior had high hopes for the effects from the establishment of district schools. At that time, many workhouses were established under one roof, which housed both adults and children. When Senior visited the workhouse school at Southampton, he saw the actual conditions of the workhouse school. The building apportioned to the children was separated from that for adults only by one street. The master and mistress admitted that the children frequently were absent owing to illness, and that girls especially lost their places and returned to the workhouses, upon which they were immediately negative influenced by the adults. The principle causes of corruption were the degraded state in which they arrived, meetings with adults, however rare, and visits from relatives. The paupers were treated as a tribe. Their relatives could see them once a week, and these visits generally undid all the moral good done during the preceding week.

The district schools, therefore, ought to be located at a distance from the workhouse, and Senior had no doubt that the great success of those which were established by the metropolitan and northern unions was in great measure due to their distance from the workhouse and from the friends and relatives of the children.[26]

Moreover, the effect of district schools contributed to the diminished pauperism of London. The good education given in these district schools put an end to hereditary pauperism and diminished crime by educating children.

6. Conclusion

Senior emphasized the importance of the education at the end of the 1834 Report. And, Senior thought that education by the government was a means to solve the poverty problem. He firmly insisted that the government should intervene in the education.

After the death of Senior, the Elementary Education Act of 1870 was established. The Act aimed to increase the penetration of the elementary education. According to the Act, the government provided school accommodation to all the children who came from the districts without elementary education efficient and suitable provision.

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[25] Senior 1861: 74–82.

[26] Ibid: 88–90.

Although it is hard to prove that Senior directly influence the Elementary Education Act of 1870, he is one of the contributors to compulsory education in England.

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