



On the Education in *The Catcher in the Rye* From Perspectives of Family, School and Society

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Abstract

Among today's intense international competition, human resource has exactly become the chief concern of the world comprehensive strength. And more and more attention is paid to education. However, while school education is valued, another two kinds of education are ignored, namely, family education and social education. Therefore, in order to bring the equally importance of them to people, this thesis tries to analyze *The Catcher in the Rye* from these three perspectives of education, and call on all of us to contribute to the cause of education.

Key words: *The Catcher in the Rye*; Family; School; Society

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, education has become one of the most significant topics in academic field. Jerome David Salinger (1919-2010) was a famous contemporary American novelist and *The Catcher in the Rye* is known to us as one of his most influential masterpieces. The novel reflects a series of education issues which cause resonance from many teenagers and educators. On all accounts, it still has its unique enlightenment for today's education. There are a substantial number of readers are fascinated

by it. Salinger shows us an antisocial hero and a modern rebel (Bloom, 1987). The portraiture of Holden is so vivid because Salinger observes various kinds of unhealthy phenomena in American society after World War Two (Huang, 2010). The young J.D. and Holden share the same personalities somewhat. So it can be inferred that Holden is an autobiographical role (Zhou, 2014).

In the tone of Holden, the author deeply expressed the great contrast and conflict between a pure ideal world of childhood and an ugly real world of adult. Holden's bewilderment not only resulted from his typical adolescent psychology, but also from family, school and social factors (Ma, 2009). This work reminds us to think more about today's education and inspires our exploration of ideal education pattern. In the process of talent cultivation, family education is the root of the school education, and school education is the key of the whole education process, while the social education is the continuation of family education and school education. Taking off any one, the integrity of the whole education chain will be affected (Chang, 2011).

This paper analyzes the roots behind the educational failure from three perspectives of education: family, school and society. The study authentically makes people be aware of the important roles all of these three factors play in children's education and provides them with hints to precisely find out the corresponding solutions.

1. ROOTS BEHIND THE FAILURE OF EDUCATION

In the year of 1951, *The Cather in the Rye* was firstly published. America had just won the victory of World War II at that time, and a materialism society came into being. The failure of education is roughly attributed to three main reasons in such a society.

In the first place, the excessively developed material civilization is the primary reason. During that period,

America obtained a large amount of wealth by loaning and selling weapons and other logistics. Besides, the international financial system formed in 1944, fully maintained and realized the economic hegemony of the United States. However, the mainstream culture in American society was severely shocked, and consumerism and hedonism appeared as a trend. The lack of the spiritual demand made people, especially middle school students, feel lost, confused and depressed.

Another reason is the panic and anxiety to potential crisis, which was manifested from three aspects (Liu, 2014). First, human beings' infinite desire and narrow-mindedness pushed nature close to and even exceed the limit load. Second, the cold war and the tense nuclear arms race between the two major military blocs urged some non-nuclear countries also wants to develop nuclear weapons for their own safety concerns. Third, the dissimilation of the relationship between people brought great impact to the traditional morals and values.

Finally, the education mechanism itself is also one cause. The neglect of scientific knowledge instruction resulted in the lack of specialized technical personnel and scientific research personnel. After World War II, Dewey's practical education theory was misused and abused in the United States (Xiao, 2009). In spite of the development of community colleges and vocational college, the student's basic theoretical knowledge is generally lower. Moreover, the post-war baby boom generation gave rise to education funding insufficiency. This not only affected the quality of education, but also resulted in unequal education opportunity. Besides, teachers' low social status and treatment are also an important cause of the American education problem (Shi, 2013).

2. THREE PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATION

Generally, according to the size of scope, education is divided into three kinds, namely, family education, school education and social education. And the following part will give you a close observation on education in *The Catcher in the Rye* from perspectives of family, school and society.

2.1 From the Perspective of Family

Family education is the first step to direct juveniles' behavior. The key to family education lies in parents' teaching through their actions as well as words. After World War II, the U.S. adults are facing more and more temptation and pressure. The family structure also became more instable. Problems, such as alcoholic parents, parental conflict and domestic violence, pose immeasurable impact on adolescent psychologically and behaviorally. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden's confusion and rebellion are closely related to the lack of family education.

Holden was born in a rich and enviable middle class family. And all of his grandmother, parents and brother, are wealthy. However, they are just fulfilled the role as "ATM" in his growth. They only provided him with material comforts, but ignored his spiritual needs. Seldom communicating with their children, they did not know Holden's real demand at all. And the deep gap between them was unavoidable. Without a correct concept of education, they considered that leading a rich life when he grew up was the only symbol of success in life.

Harmonious family relations will make teenagers effectively deal with interpersonal relations in society. Oppositely, the unhealthy family ties will lead to teenagers' misbehavior, poor social relationship and rebellion. In this work, Holden didn't get proper guidance and due care from his parents.

2.2 From the Perspective of School

Education teenagers receive at school are the most systematic, concentrated and deep-set one. The school is always a special education organization to cultivate children in knowledge, skills, and conduct (Chang, 2011). However, schools referred in this novel are not such wonderful places. They lied to the whole society, saying that they mold boys into splendid and outstanding young men. What's more, teachers flattered well-dressed parents while only vaguely smiled at those who are corny-looking. In addition to those prejudices, ignorance and hypocrisy, teachers even did not dedicate themselves to their duties. There is a sharp contrast between teachers' indifference and Holden's consideration.

Apart from teachers, what students have done also disgusted Holden.

Pencey was full of crooks. Quite a few guys came from these very wealthy families, but it was full of crooks anyway. The more expensive a school is, the more crooks it has...and all you do is talk about girls and liquor and sex all day, and everybody sticks together in these dirty little goddam cliques. (Salinger, 2001)

No wonder he failed to have a true friend to talk to.

Overwhelmed by hypocrisy, the school becomes a hotbed of falsity and deception. In fact, a top priority should be given to morality rather than knowledge in school education. Not only excellent teachers, but also qualified classmates are needed in the students' study. Teachers and students should help each other and make progress together in the process of teaching and learning.

2.3 From the Perspective of Society

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, traditional social values are gradually replaced by the modern capitalist values, valuing money rather than human. Realizing hypocrisy and deception everywhere, Holden used "phony" to describe the society.

The journey in New York did not recover Holden's confidence of life. On the contrary, it made his mind

break. More hypocrisy and snobbery among adults were presented before Holden. Perverts and morons were visible all over the Edmont Hotel where was full of "Screwballs". Living in such a terrible society, no wonder Holden exclaimed,

I think, even, if I ever die, and they stick me in a cemetery, and I have a tombstone and all, it'll say 'Holden Caulfield' on it, and then what year I was born and what year I died, and then right under that it'll say "Fuck you." I'm positive, in fact. (Salinger, 2001)

It is said that the word "phony" has appeared forty-four times in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Just in this way, Holden expressed his dislike and disappointment of the surrounding environment. Compared with another two kinds of education, social education's influence on people's life is the most permanent (Hou & Zhang, 2007).

CONCLUSION

The Catcher in the Rye expresses Salinger's query and dissatisfaction with the old-fashioned education. After analyzing the education in this work from perspectives of family, school and society, the deficiency and inadequacy in teenagers' education are obvious. Holden did not receive any proper education and guidance in his unconcerned family. Neither did he build any sincere and lasting friendship in school. The snob and misunderstanding of teachers and students pushed him into despair. The false and cold materialistic society made everything worse and worse. Therefore, he was eager to become a catcher in the rye, protecting children from degeneration. To some extent, Holden's experience reflects the spiritual journey of the "Beat Generation" (Fu, 2013).

Today, more and more attention has been paid to the construction of a harmonious society in an all-round way and to develop the quality education. The educational problems referred in this novel bring current education

a lot of thinking and enlightenment. Teenage is morally and psychologically a critical stage of people's growth. Complex and systematic as education is, it can not be finished by one person in one day. Ideal education will only achieve when family, school and social education harmoniously coordinates with each other.

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