

THE BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES
THE FACULTY OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS
3rd International Conference: Synergies in Communication
Future of Europe
Bucharest, 14-15 November 2014

**THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH EDUCATION:
VALUABLE VICTORIAN EDUCATORS**

Levarda Mihaela Luminita

The Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication
The Bucharest University of Economic Studies
Bucharest, Romania

Abstract:

Education has always played an important role in the economic prosperity of the nation. Therefore, the desire for bettering the educational policy has never rested regardless of the country or the period in which the educators and writers struggled. My paper focuses on the emergence of teacher training colleges in nineteenth-century England because they formed valuable educators. The paper also analyses *Nicholas Nickleby*, a novel written by Charles Dickens to reveal the crisis of the English educational background at the beginning of the Victorian Age.

Key words: Victorian education, educational policy, valuable educators, teacher training colleges, writers

INTRODUCTION

A great number of educational improvements were made in the Victorian Age when the passion for learning was growing among all social classes. Throughout the nineteenth century increasingly more students were seen studying in newer and better schools, colleges and universities. My paper focuses on the Victorian educational policy because it managed to establish not only schools, colleges and universities, but also teacher training colleges which formed valuable educators with a strong desire to teach. At the same time, my paper analyses *Nicholas Nickleby*, a novel in which the sensible young assistant Nicholas Nickleby has the qualities of a trained teacher. David Wardle pointed out that throughout the Victorian Age there was a debate about ‘whether to regard teaching as a vocation or as a profession’, and that ‘a ‘real’ teacher feels a strong sense of vocation, since teachers are born, not made’ [1, pp. 99, 100]. He said that if teaching was regarded as a vocation, it would reduce the usefulness of training for teaching [1, p. 100]. Nevertheless, the foundation of teacher training colleges in the Victorian Age made teaching a recognised profession. Nowadays in England and Wales a graduate who wants to become a fully qualified teacher has to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). To teach in state-maintained schools, a graduate must complete a one-year programme of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in a school. The future teacher also receives a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) and/or master's-level credits. Graduates and undergraduates can also choose to attend teacher training courses at universities and colleges. Universities offer at least two school experience placements as part of the training [2].

1. THE FIRST TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES

When Dickens wrote *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9) the government was at the beginning of a reform for the education of the working-class children. In 1833 the State offered a grant of £20,000 for education, which in the following years grew to £125,000 per annum. Paz’s opinion was that education was becoming “a matter of high policy” in the eyes of the State [3, p. xviii]. Paz explained that although the schoolhouse grant of 1833 had been frugal, it represented “the seed from which grew a major department of state. The religious, educational, legislative, and administrative contexts dictated the form that the department took” [3, p. 10]. Introducing a Bill in 1833, J.A. Roebuck wanted to create ‘the universal and national Education of the Whole People’ [3, p. 11]. His Bill was not a success, but the government suggested a grant of £20,000 for the foundation of schoolhouses in England. Because the grant was insufficient, Lord John Russell agreed with the Radicals’ demands in 1839, the year in which *Nicholas Nickleby* had already been published and weekly read with great interest by many Victorians. Sandiford stated that, according to the government, there was “a serious lack of competent teachers”, and thus in 1835 they voted “a sum of £10,000 for the foundation of model schools. However, only “after the formation of the Committee of Council on Education in 1839 any action had been taken” [4, p. 42].

Sandiford explained that although the monitorial system had been in existence since 1805, it had managed to train only a small number of monitors. Therefore, The Home and Colonial Society established a training college for female teachers in Gray's Inn Road in 1836, Elizabeth Mayo being one of the founders and six years later the first woman to be employed in teacher training [4, p. 47].

There had been a Pupil-Teacher system earlier in the century, as well. Yet the first Training School of men teachers of lower condition was founded in 1838. Two years later it was called Training College, and some of the Pupil Teachers were moved from Norwood to Battersea. Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth and E. Carleton Tufnell are the founders of the first Training College [5, p. 292, 293]. Within a year the College was taken over by the National Society and renamed St John's College. The National Society also founded St Mark's College (1840). The Victorian Training College for school teachers has become the University of St Mark & St John (Marjon) [6].

Paz asserted that "the educational events of the 1830s were not mere prolegomena to Russell's reforms. They have a rich history of their own, and the policy that developed in that decade in large measure dictated the ways in which the State intervened in education in later decades" [3, p. 11].

2. NICHOLAS NICKLEBY: A YOUNG EDUCATOR

Inspector James Hughes stated that "the highest form of teaching was the informal, the indirect, the incidental" [7, p. 1], the kind of teaching that Dickens himself used. Hughes considered him a higher ranked educator for the educational principles expressed through his evolving characters and stories. He thought that Dickens was very influential, although his teaching materials were his novels, not school textbooks or scientific pedagogy. He had no proper education for teaching, since he did not attend a teacher training college. Therefore, his main didactic method was to instill morality and good deeds through characters such as the young assistant Nicholas Nickleby and the kind-hearted brothers Cheeryble, who were inspired from real life:

"To turn to a more pleasant subject, it may be right to say that there are two characters in this book which are drawn from life: the BROTHERS CHEERYBLE. These who take an interest in this tale, will be glad to learn that their liberal charity, their singleness of heart, their noble nature, and their unbounded benevolence, are no creation of the Author's brain; but are prompting every day some munificent and generous deed in that town of which they are the pride and honour. There is only one other point, on which I would desire to offer a remark. If Nicholas be not always blameless or agreeable, he is not always intended to appear so. He is a young man of an impetuous temper and of little or no experience; and I saw no reason why such a hero should be lifted out of nature". [8, p. viii-xix]

Nicholas Nickleby and the brothers Cheeryble have come to be cherished by their readers in England and abroad thanks to Dickens's talent who was able to create timeless characters. Nicholas Nickleby is a young educator who meets all the qualities of a trained teacher, being compassionate and having the opportunity to revolt against the schoolmaster, the terrible antagonist Mr. Squeers. Nicholas Nickleby is a kind-hearted young man; he resembles his late father, who had a good heart, while his uncle Ralph Nickleby is heartless,

as Nicholas observes the first time he sees him when he does not believe that his brother passed away because of a broken heart: "There is no such thing; ... a broken heart – nonsense, it's the cant of the day", says Ralph. "Some people, I believe, have no hearts to break," observes Nicholas, quietly [8, p. 18].

When the author gives the main character the power to overcome the injustices of an unfair situation, that character becomes a role model in the eyes of the audience. Nicholas Nickleby can be considered a role model because he is a young educated gentleman with a noble heart, although "he is not a Master of Arts" [8, p. 21] to comply with the demands required by Mr Wackford Squeers's Academy, Dotheboys Hall: "Nicholas has not long completed such education as his poor father could give him," rejoined Mrs Nickleby [8, p. 20]. Nicholas and Kate remained penniless when their father passed away, thus neither he nor his sister could continue their education.

"EDUCATION. – At Mr Wackford Squeers's Academy, Dotheboys Hall, at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Great Bridge in Yorkshire. Youth are boarded, clothed, booked, furnished with pocket-money, provided with all necessaries, instructed in all languages, living and dead, mathematics, orthography, geometry, astronomy, trigonometry, the use of the globes, algebra, single stick (if required), writing, arithmetic, fortification, and every other branch of classical literature. Terms, twenty guineas per annum. No extras, no vacations, and diet unparalleled. Mr Squeers is in town, and attends daily, from one till four, at the Saracen's Head, Snow Hill. N.B. An able assistant wanted. Annual salary £5. A Master of Arts would be preferred." [8, p. 20-21]

When Ralph Nickleby reads the article, Nicholas thinks that Dotheboys Hall is a very good Academy where the children's main objective is to learn a lot of subjects. Yet the salary offered by the schoolmaster is very small, which is in opposition with the demands and the quality described in the advertisement. Indeed, Nicholas suffers a profound disappointment when he arrives at the Academy. He pities the children who live a hard life in the hands of a soulless schoolmaster. Wackford Squeers owns a cheap boarding school for the boys belonging to the lower-middle classes. Sadly, after they get there they are dressed in ragged clothes, they are offered little food and of poor quality, and they share their beds with other children. At the beginning of the nineteenth century "any man who had proven his unfitness for any other occupation in life, was free, without examination or qualification, to open a school anywhere" [8, p. 7], just like Mr. Squeers, the schoolmaster of Dotheboys Hall. Although he is poorly paid, Nicholas does not leave the school because of the small salary. When he finally decides to leave Dotheboys Hall, it is because of the unfair, cold-hearted, bold schoolmaster who dares to raise his hand at him and at his pupil Smike. Nicholas does not have a solution to help the children of Dotheboys Hall, maybe because he is too young, unexperienced and unqualified: he did not attend a teacher training college. However, he can teach a lesson like a trained teacher. From this perspective we can consider teaching as a vocation. Yet, a qualified teacher maybe would have had a solution to ameliorate the situation. An inspection would have been a very good idea, but the writer has presented a reflection of pure reality: the small number of inspectors to investigate schools at the beginning of the Victorian Age.

Nicholas is a helpless orphan with no financial support. When he leaves the Academy the author sends Smike after him. Smike is a forsaken boy who walks away without looking back and he is sure that he will not be forced to return, since he has a guardian

angel to protect him. After he leaves the Academy, Nicholas does not know what to do next, but Smike is confident that everything will be fine by the side of his new protégé.

In Mr. Squeers's school what it matters the most is that the children can be left there for a long time without anyone in their family worrying about them. If the mother of those two boys brought to Dotheboys Hall by their step father, wanted to know how they were treated, Mr. Squeers would surely tell her that they were fine, they received a good education, they were well fed and dressed and she did not need to worry about them. Her new husband, of course, would approve of Mr. Squeers's words, since he was not the biological father of the children; the truth was not important to him. Nevertheless, the novel offers a happy ending to all the good characters of the novel, including to the pupils of Dotheboys Hall who successfully confront Mrs. Squeers and her children in the absence of Mr. Squeers, in the end having the opportunity to run away.

According to Hughes, Dickens's objective was "to reveal the best educational ideals, and to expose what he regarded as weak or wrong in school methods, and especially in child training" [7, p. 2], with only one purpose: to change the existing reality, to make it better.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Although the nineteenth century is not a good setting for romantic stories, Chesterton regards Nicholas as a romantic hero who 'wanders through the world', then works as assistant of an insensible schoolmaster, whom he confronts, and then he is rewarded with the love of a young lady [9, p. 3]. This is a romantic vision in a century where real life is harsh. Chesterton was born much later than Dickens. He was born in 1874, after the passing of the Education Law of 1870 and a series of other reforms in the educational process. Therefore, he was familiar with the new Training Colleges for teachers, with the Royal Commissions who used to inspect a lot of schools every year, and with trained teachers who did their work properly. His opinion was that Dickens should have mentioned an appointment of the Royal Commission to inquire into Mr. Squeers's activity in his school [9, p. 3]. Social reformer and educator Kay-Shuttleworth established "the first school inspector system" after being appointed as secretary to the committee of privy council on education in 1839. Moreover, one of his new methods of teaching, 'the use of phonics to teach reading' is still used in English schools [6].

At the end of the novel Nicholas Nickleby is not an assistant teacher anymore because this is not his destiny. Like the author of the novel, Nicholas is just a passerby or a witness to the events that take place in a period when the educational reform is only at the beginning. He is not given the opportunity to change Wackford's thinking. However, his role is important because the story was created to be read by many people in order to convince them to take the initiative of a real change. In one of his *Speeches* Dickens pointed out that: "If we would reward honesty, if we would hold out encouragement to good, if we would eradicate that which is evil and correct that which is bad, education – comprehensive, liberal education – is the one thing needful, and the only effective end" [10, p. 50]. Charles Dickens was familiar with Kay-Shuttleworth's educational views. The Victorian Kay-Shuttleworth was 'resident in charge' of the first Teacher Training College [5, p. 293] which in 2013 it "received legal confirmation of University title", namely The University of St Mark & St John, due to the fact that since its foundation in the Victorian Age it has become:

“the most experienced teacher training provider in the South West, successfully training teachers since 1840, and receiving praise in the Ofsted inspections. This year Marjon has been placed in the top 10 of Higher Education institutions in England, and in 2012 we were awarded 80% for Teaching Excellence in the Sunday Times University Guide”. [6]

Therefore, the future of English education lies in the hands of the teachers who are trained in the best educational institutions, and the first and most important were founded in the Victorian Age. They are offered qualitative training courses and practice in teacher training institutions which are prepared to make them the most effective contemporary teachers.

REFERENCES:

- [1]. Wardle, David, 1970. “English Popular Education 1780-1970,” London, Cambridge University Press, pp. 99, 100.
- [2]. Department for Education. Get Into Teaching. ‘Teacher training – what are my options?’, Internet source; <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/teacher-training-options> (accessed on August 2014).
- [3]. Paz, Denis G., 1980. “The Politics of Working-class Education in Britain, 1830-50,” Oxford, Manchester University Press, pp. viii, 10,11.
- [4]. Sandiford, Peter, 1910. “The Training of Teachers in England and Wales”. New York, Teachers College, Columbia University, pp. 42, 47.
- [5]. Bart, Kay- Shuttleworth, James, 1862. “Four Periods of Public Education,” London, Longman, Green and Roberts, vol. II, pp. 292, 293.
- [6]. University of St. Mark & St. John. “About the University of St. Mark & St. John”, Internet source: <http://www.marjon.ac.uk/about-marjon/> (accessed on July 2014).
- [7]. Hughes, L. James, 1902. “Dickens as an Educator,” New York, Appleton & Company, pp. 1, 2.
- [8]. Dickens, Charles, 1868. “The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby,” London, Hazell, Watson & Viney, pp. viii, xix, 7, 18, 20, 21.
- [9]. Chesterton, G.K., 1911. “Appreciation and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens,” London, J.M. Dent & Sons, New York: E.P., Dutton & Co, p. 3.
- [10]. Dickens, Charles. “Speeches: Literary and Social”. The Gutenberg Project, p. 50, Internet source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/824> (accessed on July 2014).