A MAN AHEAD OF HIS TIME: HEZEKIAH WOODWARD. A CONSIDERATION OF THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VISIONARY'S VIEWS ON TEACHING THE YOUNG IN ENGLAND

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Abstract:
As early as in the first half of the 17th century a steady outflow of critical views and advice about education was to be heard from English educationalists and would-be-reformers. One of the voices which particularly stood out was that of Hezekiah Woodward. An analysis of Woodward's ideas discussed in this paper, is preceded by a brief presentation of the state of schooling in the early Stuart age in order to determine whether or not the educationalist's views were in concert with the realities of those days.
Woodward, having become acquainted with The Great Didactic by Comenius, decided to rebel against the accepted practices in schools, and consequently chose to work out his own ideas.
This paper provides evidence that the educationalist's proposals aimed at reforming seventeenth-century education were well ahead of their time. He advocates a greater sense of responsibility on the part of the school and its masters, the parental duty to participate in moral and religious instruction and teaching through the senses; as well as a clearly-expressed belief that handicapped children are equally worthy of being educated. With this approach, Hezekiah Woodward made a name for himself. Though discarded at the time, his ideas became a basis for a modern viewpoint of contemporary education.

Key Words: Hezekiah Woodward, elementary education in 17th –century England

Introduction:

Early Stuart England had inherited a system of education based upon petty schools on the elementary level and grammar schools, in which admittance was dependent upon the ability to read and write. In these educational institutions the mediaeval curriculum still prevailed, though it would gradually witness adaptation by Puritanism as a means of religious study. In both the early Stuart age and the Commonwealth period, schools were to provide instruction mainly to children whose better-off parents viz. aristocrats, the greater gentry and merchants could afford to pay fees and other costs incurred whilst undergoing instruction. Thus it was generally assumed that education was beyond the reach of the majority of the populace.

Though petty and grammar schools were nominally free, almost all of them charged entrance and tuition fees, which were to cover the costs of a schoolroom, a master and an usher. In addition books, stationery and even fuel were to be provided by the pupils' parents. As for the contents of courses taught, Latin dominated the curriculum. Since it was the medium of instruction at universities, schoolboys had to learn to converse in this tongue, and for this purpose, standard dialogues in classical Latin were in use. The study of the Greek language focused on the construe of the New Testament, memorising nouns, verbs and long lists of Greek roots. Divinity had its place, although a secondary one, in the curriculum of the grammar school. Rhetoric was regarded as the crown of the course for older boys, but in fact it was grammar that was the chief study. Its primary object was to make Latin a live, spoken language. The justification for Latin being a top course in seventeenth-century instruction can be found in John Brinsley's *Ludus Literarius*, where amongst lengthy verses the author states: "To the end to fit them to answer any learned man in Latin or to dispute extempore;

also to train them up to be able to speak purely when they come to the Universities [...] or to fit them, if they shall go beyond the seas as Gentlemen who travel [...][244].

As a consequence of stressing the instruction of Latin in particular, but also Greek and Divinity, other courses were somewhat neglected, such as writing, geography, history, music and dancing, even arithmetic. The result was that boys were unable to find chapters and verses in the Bible and other books due to a lack of basic knowledge.

To picture English education at this time is to see not only the curriculum's contents and methods used to impart knowledge, but also the master's and usher's attitude towards those they were to teach. Amongst various sources dating from the 17th century, such descriptions are not unique:

Many a white and tender hand, which the fond mother had passionately kissed a thousand times, have I seen whipped until it was covered with blood; perhaps for smiling, or for going a yard and a half out of the gate, or for writing an O for an A, or an A for an O. These were great faults! Many a brave and noble spirit has been there broken, others have run from thence, and were never heard of afterwards[245].

Rosemary O'Day argues that corporal punishment, which was commonly used in petty and grammar schools, contributed to a drop in enrolments.

Another reason for falling enrolments can be attributed to the parents' greed. This is how Thomas Morrice makes the point:

[Many engaged] some poore Batchelor of Arts from the Universities to teach their children [...] for ten pounds a yeare. Is it not commonly seene that most Gentlemen will give better wages and deal more bountifully with a fellow who can teach a Dogge or reclaim a Hawke [...]?[246].

Besides low wages offered to tutors, the parents themselves failed on the whole in reading to their children, talking to them, saying prayers together and teaching them from early childhood to differentiate between good and evil.

In the sixteen 30's and 40's a number of English educationalists and thinkers, being inspired by Comenius' views, began to identify all these faults within elementary and post-elementary instruction and call for an educational reform. One of the most distinguished and outstanding thinkers and critics of seventeenth-century schooling was a private schoolmaster – Hezekiah Woodward (1590-1675).

Main Text:

After the results of his own experience in his childhood[247] and of his own observation drawn in his adulthood[248], Hezekiah Woodward criticised the accepted practice of his day which emphasised mere learning by rote and neglected a child's comprehension. This is how, in his preface to *A Child's Patrimony*, Woodward put this across:

The understanding of a Childe is left to its owne information, and its memory is first dealt with and tasked, a burden though not so felt, yet a burden, and heavier than we would have to be imposed upon ourselves, for we will understand first, and then commit to Memorie, which is the order of Nature[249].

For Woodward working upon a child's understanding was a key to success. The schoolmaster did not confine himself simply to a mere statement, but expanded on this point in depth and at length in his work *A Light to Grammar*. In this publication he first recognises and analyses the differences in children and only then does he proceed to show that the child's progress must be secured by engaging the use of the senses. What Woodward meant by that, he explains in the following words:

[244] John Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius or the Grammar School shewing how to proceede from the first entrance into learning, to the highest perfection*, (London: London Man, 1612), 211.
[245] Rosemary O'Day, *Education and Society 1500-1800*, (New York: Longman, 1982), 201.
[246] Thomas Morrice, *An apology for Schoolmasters*, (London: Bernard Alsop for Richard Flemming, 1619), 32.
[247] Hezekiah Woodward suffered from a speech defect which hindered his progress at school and therefore as a youth he thought that education was useless for him.
[248] He began his public career as a schoolmaster and ended it as a minister.
[249] Woodward, *A Childes Patrimony: laid out upon the good nurture, or tilling over the whole man [...]*. (London: I. Legatt, 1640), 8.

Our scope is to unfold the understanding, to set up a light there […]. Our purpose is that he shall not stir one inch farther than he carries his Torch or Lanthorne in his hand, that thereby the understanding may doe its office. He shall do this worke playing, and play working; he shall seem idle and think he is in sport, when he is indeed serious and best imployed. Precognition is an anticipation of the understanding, that is a stealing upon it, and catching of it, unfolding unto it, that the child knows not by that medium a meanes he knew before; or It is that whereby I slip into a child's understanding before he be aware; so as a child shall have done his task, before he shall suspect that any was imposed; this is done by Precognition[250].

From the above text it becomes self-evident that Woodward firmly believed that the basis of all good education boiled down to the sharpening of the senses. From the educationalist's point of view a child must be directed to see not only with the eye but with the use of understanding. Therefore sense training – as the schoolmaster suggests – was the most proper method of instruction. In his perseverance upon instructing through the senses, Woodward was a declared follower of Comenius, whom he admired and looked up to. However, he went further than his mentor and devoted an entire chapter of his book to the employment of the child's senses in nature study. In it some interesting pronouncements upon the methods of giving instruction can be found such as:

We shall finde him still in action, here and there, and everywhere, with his sticke, or with his gun, or with his casting bones, perhaps if these be not at hand he is blowing up a feather; I cannot reckon up his Implements: I believe he is as well stored for the driving his pleasant trade as is the best Merchant in the Towne for his so gainfull; we suppose him well sorted with commodities, he hath his Exchange and Warehouses too, both his box and his pocket. And we shall see that by his dealings in the world hee hath learned good part of his Grammar (that dull booke, as it is taught) before he come at it [...]. But we must take things as they come and make use of them as we can[251].

In the above and many other texts Woodward stresses and recommends that wise use should be made of all the child's active pursuits as vehicles of instruction.

In his works Woodward is not single-minded and obsessed with the term 'senses'. He belonged to a small coterie of native educationalists who believed also that the English language, at least in the early stages of schooling, should be the only medium of instruction[252]. Whilst Woodward regarded the use of the vernacular as important, he was not particularly Latin-orientated and in his opinion the initial stages of the teaching of Latin were to be based on sound psychological principles. By advocating the sense training aspect, in the employment of the mother tongue and by minimising the role of Latin courses in elementary schools, Woodward comes across as an unrecognised pioneer of such ideas in elementary education.

The educationalist's vision of reform was not only narrowed down to methods of instruction and a role of the English language; in his proposed changes he favoured an introduction of exact science into the curricula, this he believed, would "enfranchise the understanding and make the child a free denizen of the world"[253]. Albeit this viewpoint was shared by another would-be-reformer – John Dury, Woodward was alone in his pronouncements that teaching geography should be carried out with the employment of maps, pictures and globes[254].

Woodward displayed an awareness of the exceptionally high sense of duty and responsibility required of the schoolmaster, not only with regards to the kind of modules taught and methods of instructions utilised, but also to the religious and moral up-bringing of children. Such an approach the educationalist put across in the following justification:

We have filled our children's bones with sin. It is our engagement to do all we can to root that sin out, which we have been a means to root so fast in. […]. We see what an engagement it is, the greatest and strongest that can be thought of[255].

It is implicit from the above, that Hezekiah Woodward's opinion, consciously or not, gave rise to a series of works published on the subject of the inculcation of manners and morals within a

[250] Woodward, *A Light to Grammar and all other arts and sciences*, (London: Printed by M. F. for Bartlet, 1641), 15, 19-21.
[251] Ibidem, 24, 26-27.
[252] Ibidem, 45.
[253] Ibidem, 16.
[254] Woodward, *A gate to sciences, (*London: Printed at London for John Bartlet, 1641), passim.
[255] Woodward, *A Childes Patrimony […]*, 9-15.

young generation by other would-be-reformers in the 1640's. Amongst the books which discussed these issues there were for example *Youths behaviour: or decency in conversation* translated by Francis Hawkins and *The Right Teaching of Useful Knowledge* by George Snell[256].

Woodward in his works busied himself not only with these problems. In his works the author wanted to come across not so much as a critic and reformer but rather as a councillor, who with the experience he had accumulated, wished to share it with other schoolmasters, teachers and parents. All these people–the educationalist pointed out–bore the same responsibility in the child's up-bringing and instruction and he appealed to them in the following words:

When I think again what a treasure a childe is, and what a charge comes along with it; and then again what a faire opportunity the master hath in this little nurserie or seminary to prune and manure this little plant so as it may grow fruitfull that the Church and State and Parents, that all may rejoice together; when I consider the opportunity the master hath, even to his hearts desire [...] I shrink at the thought of this charge[257].

Woodward's concern for the child's well-being did not take the form of scathing criticism, but a set of guidelines and tips for other schoolmasters to follow. He was convinced that school principals must first have high expectations of themselves before they could demand such of others:

The Master hath still somethinge to doe, either about himselfe or the childe, and when he cannot make the childe better with all his care, then his care must be to make himself better, then there is no lost labour[258].

Next, Woodward chose to find fault with the part fear played in the schools of that era, illustrating carefully from his own experience and concluding with the careful differentiation between fright and the important respect of a schoolchild for his teacher; this being vital in school work. Confirmation of the above can be found in the following words:

A master must maintaine an awfullnesse in the child, else little will be done; and he must be as carefull to suppresse fear and the working of it, specially then when he would give instruction, else no good will be done. […]. If the Childe deserves to be smart, let it smart afterwards when the lesson is done[259].

No less does the would-be-reformer expect from teachers, whom he does not reprimand but as a colleague offers his advice:

The Master must have patience for all that: he must compose himself to goe as slowly as the child's conceit requires; the master wisdome is to stoope to the childe, to see where he stickes. His pen is but a dead thing; the Master must put life into it; he must so speak that the childe must see him speak, he must heare with the eye, and learne to speak by his fingers[260].

With an equally interesting insight, the educationalist presented his views upon the early training of children and the parents' role therein. Woodward delved into the nature of an infant, pointing out that a crucial role was to be played by the child's parents at this stage; their obligation should be to care for the child's soul as well as his body and intellect. Woodward's observations read as follows:

Assuredly it is the cause of much mischiefe and sorrow in the world, that the parents think themselves discharged of their duty towards their child, when they have charged the School with it [...]. The mother thinks that the school must look to the washing her child's hands, putting on the girdle, its attendance at the table, and his manners there, and if there be any other faults, as there will be many, then we know, who shall heare of them all, and we know as well, that none will be mended, when there is no better care at home [...]. The mother is resolved to go to the Master or Mistresse [...]. When she has done this, she thinks she has done her duty[261].

Instead the author reminded the parents of their sacred duty, which was to set an example themselves and ensure that their off-spring copied it. In his deliberations Woodward emphasises that

[256] Francis Hawkins, *Youths behaviour: or decency in conversation,* (London: Printed by W. Wilson for W. Lee, 1646).
G. Snell, *The Right Teaching of Useful Knowledge*. (London: W. Dugard, 1649).
[257] Woodward, *A Childes Patrimony […]*, 159.
[258] Woodward, *A Light to Grammar and all other arts and sciences,* 149-152.
[259] Woodward, *A Childes Patrimony […]* 9-10.
[260] Woodward, *A Light to Grammar and all other arts and sciences,* 83-84.
[261] Woodward, *A Childes Patrimony […]*, 11-12.

the parents' behaviour must be–as the would-be-reformer put it–"the child's book, from which he learns to speak and hear"[262]. From the schoolmaster's point of view, the core of the parents' obligation during infancy and early childhood lay in preventing evil and increasing goodness.

Nor should it be assumed that the parents' role ceased when the child reached school age. For Woodward it was of prime importance that the parents' co-operation and care still continued. In fact, in the guidelines addressed to parents, the author claimed that the parents' supervision ended only when the child had become an adult and "when the days of schooling are about to close, it is the parents' duty to give anxious and careful thought to the choice of a calling for the childe"[263].

Conclusion:

In the early 1640's certain revolutionary ideas concerning the reform of education were put forward by a number of would-be-reformers, but Hezekiah Woodward's radical views were the most prominent. Inspired by the ideas of Comenius and supported by the work of other native educationalists, it seemed to Woodward that in the times of expectations and hope which had been aroused by the summoning of the Short and then the Long Parliaments, his ideas could contribute greatly to a radical reform of education in England.

Woodward's works revealed to his contemporaries new concepts that were based on the nature and needs of the child and encouraged the greater use of the vernacular and the employment of teaching aids. Nor did Woodward overlook the importance of morals and manners that he felt should be instilled in the minds of those undergoing both elementary and post-elementary instruction. Similarly, the educationalist recognised the role of teachers and parents in the process of educating the young and he defined the responsibilities and duties of men who, like himself, were heads of schools.

Interesting and modern–even from the present perspective–as Woodward's suggested fresh approaches were, they were so far ahead of the current thinking, that clearly such deep changes as he proposed could not occur 'overnight'.

A child's understanding, which the would-be-reformer emphasised as essential, would have had to be first understood and accepted by teachers and parents alike. It is mainly due to this lack of understanding on the part of adults that his suggestions remained in idea form only. The recommendations laid out by Woodward in the seventeenth century were, however, of great value two to three centuries later when they were the bases for subsequent educational reforms.

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[262] Ibidem, 12.
[263] Ibidem, 179-181.