

The Importance of Value-based Education in the Development of Human Beings: A critical analysis of Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick*

Dr. AGUESSY Anne Nathalie

Jouvencia Agossi Université d'Abomey- Calavi

ABSTRACT: Education, as acquirement of knowledge, abilities, values, beliefs and traditions has always been a keystone of personal and societal development. The importance of formal education to pull oneself up in the society has been inspired by Frank Whitney to Dick, the hero and main character of the novel *Ragged Dick*. Dick's friend Frank, saw in formal education, the key to success in the American society even if Dick is born to socioeconomic misfortune. But *Ragged Dick*'s inner values added to the acquired education opened to him a new horizon. The objective of this paper is to show that formal education does not automatically bring success but the education based on values. Dick's love and heart have earned him successive admirations. Therefore, could education without values endanger the development of human beings? This study draws on New Historicism for theoretical insight and orientation.

KEY WORDS: *Ragged Dick* – Value-based education- Inner values- Education- Human development

I. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

Education has always been a cornerstone of human right and personal development as well as the growth of the society. It is the act of acquiring knowledge toward the development of human being. It plays a great role in the life of everyone and getting proper education is very necessary to succeed and to have a happy life. Education based on values is a process by which people give moral values to others. It addresses the issue of how to behave in the society or build in a positive way someone's personality. Education based on values, as key to personal and societal development is recognized and valued in American Society through the life of Dick for instance. The spontaneous service provided from empathy has been recognized by the society and it participates to Dick's success in life. The innovation here consists in *Ragged Dick* capacity to exploit the insights provided to him. In fact, Dick, a young orphan boy of fourteen years old, works in the streets of New York, for his living. He polishes shoes of his customers or people who pass by. Little by little, he increases the desire to improve his life by having a steady home and by developing his financial position. Dick's success is due to his inner values and hard work. He also knows how to take advantage of opportunities to improve his life. He also realized the value of education and stucked to it. I do not contradict Allan Golston when he said in 'The American Dream: 'Education is the Key''. 'We know that the great equalizer in America is education, because it provides the surest path to opportunity and social mobility' but I continue hammering the same message that education without moral values is dangerous for human being development and the American society recognized these values and rewarded them through the character of Dick in *Ragged Dick* of Horatio Alger.

New historicism is the theory I use to approach this topic. It is a kind of literary theory which tries to understand history through literature. Nyauma Mokaya defines New Historicism as:

a theory that seeks to find meaning in a text by considering it within the context of the prevailing ideas and social assumptions of the historical era in which the text is produced. New Historicists such as Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, and Jonathan Goldberg, concern themselves with the political functions of literature and the concept of power, the intricate means by which cultures produce and reproduce themselves. The – New Historicists – seek to understand literature from a historical perspective, which they feel that the New Criticism did not provide. (Mokaya, New Historicism Theory)

New historicism assumes that there is a relationship between literature and history. Literature can be better understood if the context and the history are known. Knowing that *Ragged Dick* is written in the 19th century, one has to appreciate *Ragged Dick* through the prevailing culture of 1860s New York and Alger's own life there. From 1865, USA was going through the rise of industrialization and the consequential rush of migration there. There was an economic expansion in the early nineteen. This period of rapid economic progress and rising prosperity. In the northern cities, there was a gap between the wealthy and the working poor, whose numbers increased because of immigration. Despite the "rags-to-riches" stories that prevail at that time, wealth remained concentrated

In the hands of a minority group. Opportunities for social mobility even though limited give hope for advancement. That is the reason why, Dick, with a lot of humor, says that his tutor, Henry Fosdick, combining teaching with boot blacking, will be “as rich as Astor”, an extremely wealthy industrialist who was famous for his money, his class, and his high standard of living. There are at least three different social classes described in *Ragged Dick*: the lowest class with the bootblacks and other unskilled laborers; the middle class with the shopkeepers and the boys they hire, and the wealthier families who are people from the skilled labor or entrepreneurial class; represented by Mr. Greyson and Whitney families who most of time own buildings or businesses. They value education, religious morality, punctuality, and respectable dress. Throughout the story, there are many detailed explanations of what life was like on the streets in the 19th century mainly for poor young boys. Horatio Alger, a late nineteenth century writer, is concerned with social values: Work hard, study hard and save money. It is nothing else than the American Dream Dr. Kpohoué Ferdinand explains in his article “Exploring the American Dream in Action through Horatio Jr. Alger’s *Ragged Dick*”

The American Dream has been deeply rooted in the concept of a journey—the journey to a new country, the journey across generations, and of course, the journey within one’s life. It is about motion and progress, it is about optimism, and it is about finding success and fulfillment along the way. In other words, the American Dream is to achieve economic independence, especially to have a vocation and own a home in order to be happy. Instant wealth has not always been a major component of the Dream, Americans have traditionally centered their efforts on thrift and hard work. (Kpohoué 78) Like Kpohoué, Alger depicts the rags to riches story of the poor boy who studies and works hard, lives a clean life and becomes successful. Implementing their findings and learning from their studies and work in their lives, the boys will be able to improve their lot in life. That is why Daniel Michigan in his letter to Betsy DeVos, Secretary of Education said that:

“Since our country was founded, Americans have lived in search of opportunity and success—the American Dream. According to former U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, “The essence of America – that which really unites us – is not ethnicity, or nationality, or religion – it is an idea – and what an idea it is: That you can come from humble circumstances and do great things.” And what better path is there to come from nothing and achieve everything than education, the great equalizer.” “Education is key to the American Dream and adjusting the way that we look at it will help ensure that more kids will graduate and want to continue to educate themselves for the rest of their lives.” (Michigan, How Does Education Connect to Our American Dream?)

II. CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

Education is important because it promotes the knowledge, abilities, behaviors, values, or attitudes of the individuals in the society. And it is also considered as the backbone of the development of human beings. Therefore, a value-based education is an education oriented to values such as generosity, love, freedom, respect, honesty, tolerance, forgiveness and kindness. A value-based educated person respects others, helps others to grow and to be better and always speaks truth. When a society lacks these values, it impacts the whole life of the society in every domain. There will be more disintegrated families with a lot of problems like domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape. In the society, there will be a lot of social problems like theft, rapes, crimes, murders and corruption. That is the reason why our society needs a value-oriented education as Patil states

Value-Based education is highly needed in our modern society because our lives have become more miserable. The quantity of education has considerably increased, but the quality has decreased. Why? The number of educated people has reached at a high level, but murder, hatred, and selfishness have spread out like wildfire everywhere. Why? Many institutions are opened, but only few civilized people are produced. Why? Degrees are available for all, but the dignity has gone down. Why? Trained people are produced from many institutions, but sincere people are very few. Why? Many books are written; much research is done; many professional achievements are attained, but humanity is threatened. Why? Therefore, we need Value Based-Education. (Patil 7) What could be the value sought for in education? The Indian doctrine has solved the problem by putting clearly the four Purusharthas as a comprehensive theory of human values. The four Purusharthas are: • Dharma : Moral value such as duties, virtues, etc. • Artha : Wealth and political values. • Kama : Happiness and Aesthetic joy. • Moksha : Liberation or true Self-realisation. (Patil 15) We do need all these values for the human development. According to TargetStudy.com, education in India, Personality development does not mean to enrich a person’s outlook. Personality development does not mean achieving good grades. Personality development is not just one thing but it is a cluster of many things. Personality development is the knowledge of what you are. It includes all the traits you have, your strengths and weaknesses. Knowing them is just not sufficient, you need to accept them. If you are not ready to accept them, then change them. Personality development is self-confidence and positivity (Importance of Education in Personality Development)

The development of human beings passes through the development of his personality, his success and his self-fulfillment. To succeed in life, means to have a good personality, to be polite, to be courteous and to develop your self. So, according to the novel under study, what are Dick's values that brought him from rags to success so much that he could develop fully his personality?

III. DICK'S VALUES EMERGING FROM THE NOVEL

Many values emerge from the novel such as generosity, honesty, frankness, straight-forwardness, self-reliance and kindness. But I will focus on generosity and honesty. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines generosity as "liberality, or willingness in giving, unselfishness, munificence, nobility of thought or behavior, magnanimity". It is a great virtue and we practice it whenever we open our doors, our hearts, and our hands to others. It means that you give freely to anyone. But being generous is not only to give money to the deprived or destitute but to give one's time, one's helping hand, one's affection, one's warmth, one's friendliness, one's love. One can say without doubt that our society is suffering dangerously from lack of generosity because of our individualism. Each one wants to mind his own business or it is also because of the galloping or rapidly rising of insecurity and nobody wants to lose anything for anyone.

Generosity has a lot of benefits. Your act of generosity can impact more people than you first imagine to reach and these persons can spread also their generosity toward others. Generosity can bring you happiness and joy, it can reduce stress and fight depression and bring a sense of community. You can also benefit from your generosity to others because by paying attention to others, someone will do the same to you. Horatio Alger Jr., the author himself, was a generous person because he is altruistic. When he came to New York at thirty-four years old, he started supporting the homeless, essentially post-Civil war juvenile delinquent boys, whom he sheltered by establishing boarding homes for them. It is even said that the poverty-stricken boys, most of the time, inspired him for his stories' characters, including the extremely popular serial Ragged Dick (1868) whose main character is a very generous boy. He sees the world in a different light and believes that the world even though not perfect, can be a much better place. In chapter 3, Dick overhears a gentleman and his nephew discussing their plans for the day, and he offers his services as a guide to the young man. The uncle agrees, and they take Dick to the Astor House hotel, so he can clean up and get some second-hand clothes. Through this makeover, Dick appears to be a young gentleman. Generosity improves the life of the giver and the receiver too. Despite this, generosity is too rare in our world today.

By practicing generosity, we are actively addressing the needs of those around us and we are shaping our community or society into a healthier one. For example, in chapter 15, one evening, Ragged Dick encounters Henry Fosdick another bootblack of twelve-year-old. Henry is having a difficult time making it on the streets. Dick invites Fosdick for supper and to share his room for the night. Though poor, Dick is generous. Talking about his parent to Franck, he said "I aint got no mother. She died when I wasn't but three years old. My father went to sea; but he went off before mother died, and nothing' was ever heard of him. I expect he got wrecked or died at sea." "And what became of you when your mother died?" "The folks she boarded with took care of me, but they were poor, and they couldn't do much. When I was seven, the woman died, and her husband went out West, and then, I had to scratch for myself" (Alger, 51). Ragged Dick Alger, once homeless orphan, can easily understand what Henry Fosdick is passing through. He can feel empathy for other suffering people. He is grateful he has now a place called home and is apt to share his place with others. Another example of Dick's generosity is towards Tom Wilkins, whose mother faces eviction. Dick readily offers to cover the rent and get money from his saving account. As Dick said "I'd ought to help you, I haven't got no mother to look out for. I wish I had" (Alger 141). Most of the time, we are calculators. We wait to see how much we have left over before determining how much we can give. We must give freely and generously like Dick.

When you are generous, you are not selfish but you put others before yourself. One day, Dick and Henry Fosdick walked down to the South Ferry and, paying their two cents each, entered the ferry boat. Suddenly, a boy of six, while pointing out some object of interest, managed to creep, unobserved, beneath the chain that extends across the boat and stepping incautiously to the edge of the boat when falls into the river (Alger 177). Dick, who is a good swimmer, no sooner saw the boy fall than he resolved to rescue him (Alger 178). Dick readily jumps in to save the child who is about to go under for the third time. Dick is able to save the child. When you show generosity of spirit, you will give other help that shows generosity. Dick sacrifices some of his own earnings in order to buy to Henry Fosdick a new suit of clothes to wear while seeking employment in a shop or office. Generosity is an intentional decision that we make in our daily life. We have to start with simple steps if we want to be spending time with the needy and by considering the benefits of generosity and how many people we can save by being

Generous. Generosity is a quality like honesty, righteousness, goodness and patience that we wish we get through a value-based education. Coming to honesty, the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines honesty as “integrity, trustworthiness, truthfulness, sincerity”. As a matter of fact, an additional factor in Dick’s improvement is his honesty. The empathy that allows him to be sharp in seizing opportunities in life without being opportunistic also enables him to take initiatives in his life. The innermost freedom enables Dick to be open to the needs around him, to be honest, to be empathic instead of being overwhelmed by jealousy, bitterness and feelings of hatred and inferiority complex. In fact, Dick is a poor child, orphan, a black boot, a street boy without siblings, left alone in life, surviving. He does not have enough resources to maintain adequate standard of living. He does not have enough money to take care of basic needs such as feeding, bathing, clothing, getting education, and housing. At seven years old, he was all alone in the world. He used to sleep according to the author, in box alongside the road and wake up every morning without money and must work hard by shining shoes to get himself food. So Dick and his fellows are scratching for themselves.

These precarious and chaotic poor conditions could have lead Dick like most of the poor boys of his generation and race to all kinds of violence because a poor person is, in most cases, without moral and virtue. This poor person often ends up begging or in some form of delinquency such as robbery, burglary, criminality or drug dealers. Nonetheless, Dick was an exception of this worldwide rule that for a poor all means are good to get his basic needs. He does not steal. The narrator describes Dick in the following words: “He was above doing anything mean or dishonorable. He would not steal or cheat, or impose upon younger boys, but was frank and straightforward, manly and self-reliant. His nature was a noble one and had saved him from all mean faults” (Alger, 8). Dick is an honest boy. He is very kind and funny with his customers and used to earn his money honestly. When Mr. Greyson asked Dick to leave his change at his office anytime during the day, it is just to see if ‘the little scamp will prove honest’ (Alger, 6). He was not disappointed and after, he rewarded Dick for his honesty. At the end of chapter two and the beginning of chapter three, Dick was accused of offering a salesman a counterfeit bill of two-dollar. He was supposed to get change for one of his customers, but it turns out Dick was being tricked by the clerk who was cheating him. Dick told the customer who accused him of being ‘young rascal’ that ‘the man what took the bill said it wasn’t good and kept it.’ (Alger, 17). In time, they got the clerk to admit that he was tricking them. Dick received a little extra for this trouble. This shows how it can be rewarding to be honest and to tell the truth. The boys who are usually about the same age as Dick turn to lying, stealing, cheating but he has not. Unlike other black boots, Ragged Dick believed in honesty. For example, Mr. Whitney asks him to guide his nephew, Frank Whitney, around the city for a day because he likes Dick’s honest look. His wittiness and facility to laugh at himself and his situations help to trust him easily. Dick’s morality was even evident in his appearance. Mr. Whitney, a stranger, spontaneously trusts him as his nephew’s tour guide. Honesty is a very important virtue and life skill to be provided by a value-based education.

IV. FROM VALUE-BASED EDUCATION TO THE VALUE OF EDUCATION: A KEY TO SUCCESS AND TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

In the novel, Dick develops a secure sense of self that allows him to become more empowered to take responsibilities. Dick’s act of generosity and kindness led to self-fulfillment and personality development. He offers to share with Henry Fosdick his house in Mott Street and in return he became his tutor or teacher and taught him how to read and how to write and these valuable skills help him in his upward mobility. It is already a privilege for some middle-class people to succeed in attending school and pay for school fees, so for the poor orphan striking to find food and where to sleep like Dick, it is a dream. School costs a lot, and once you have access to it, it is hard to follow through normal expectation and to concentrate. But Dick’s sense of hard work makes him develop quickly an academic consciousness because of his self-values-oriented education. He is able to read and write in few months because despite the fact that Dick work the whole day, he tries to work and study by night because he realizes the value of education as he was told by his friend Franck that reading and writing will open for him new opportunities. He can talk freely and well and was qualified for a higher-paying job. He develops relational friendship with Franck Whitney to whom he offers his services to be his tour guide. He received from him a new suit which makes him appear as a respectable gentleman. Dick can understand much more deeply his work and the value of his life. He was smart and empathic enough to seize opportunities at the right time. He stops using his money for useless things like drinking and smoking as he used to do. By the end of the novel, at all levels of life, one can witness Dick’s constant development personally, socially, morally and economically. This investment in individual capability and self-responsibility help to improve in life. He is smart and empathic enough to get regular customers who are fond of his wittiness and humor. It is his honesty in returning Mr. Greyson’s change to him that catches Mr. Greyson’s attention and makes the older man more disposed to invite him to attend his Sunday School classes and to mentor Dick and Henry Fosdick.

Dick's courage helps him to dive into deep water to save a little boy, and the boy's father, Mr. James Rockwell, rewards Dick's courage to the extent he is able, by providing Dick with a new set of clothes to replace his wet ones and by giving him a job in his company. This offer basically changes his personality and by so doing, concludes his journey from rags to riches. Dick was able to move successfully in life not only because he is a hard worker but because of his inner set of values: honesty, generosity and openness to learn from helpful people. Ragged Dick has some good values which help to acquire education and a job. Dr. C. M. Yogi, Founder - Society for Value Education (SVE) has nicely compared Education with the Value Based-Education in his paper presented in a Workshop organized by Save the Children and Curriculum Development Centre on 29th December, 2009 as follows:

Education	Value Based Education
opens up our mind	gives us purity of heart too
provides us with skills	provides us sincerity too
extends our relationship with the world	links us with our own family members too
makes our living better	makes our life better too
teaches us to compete with others	encourages us to be complete too
makes us a good professional	makes us a whole human too
takes us to the top	takes the whole society to the top
gives us capacity of better learning	gives us the tool for a deeper understanding too
may bring limitations	is for liberation

An analysis of the above table reveals that formal institutional education must be value-oriented in integrating ethics at all the levels of study and domains in order to positively impact the lives of people, of our societies, in short, of the whole of humanity.

V. CONCLUSION

All these inner values helped Dick move from the state of the poor child, orphan, black boot, street boy without siblings, left alone in life and surviving, to the educated boy through non institutional acquired values such as reading and writing and finally to the boy who reached his personal development. The acquired values do not lead us to our personal development without inner values in some extent. The values of generosity, honesty, empathy and sense of service could be acquired values somehow but in the case of Dick who had no support system, they are inner values. And this is a very consoling and a hopeful message to the vulnerable children. Education is very important. As Allan Golston, President, U.S. Program Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation said in a letter to the 45th president, expressing the importance of education in America My parents grew up poor, put themselves through school, and for most of my childhood, they both worked two jobs to ensure my siblings and I had options that were not available to them. They were very clear that just as it was for them, education would be a critical bridge to opportunity for my brothers and me. The challenge facing our country today is the same: to give children — no matter the circumstances they were born into — a great education. We look forward to continuing to work with government, non-profits, and the private sector to make this happen. (Golston, "The American Dream: 'Education is the Key'") Yes, the importance of education is undeniable, but education without values can endanger the development of human beings and why not, of the entire humanity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Horatio, Alger Jr.. Ragged Dick or, Street Life in New York with the Boot Blacks, Boston, Loring publisher, 1868.
2. Golston, Allan. "The American Dream: 'Education is the Key'" June 9, 2016 <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/blog/post/american-dream-education-key>
3. Kpohoue, Ferdinand. "Exploring the American Dream in Action through Horatio Jr. Alger's Ragged Dick" International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL) Volume 4, Issue 6, June 2016, PP 75-84
4. - Michigan, Daniel. "How Does Education Connect to Our American Dream?": A Letter to our Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. Published on Feb 27, 2018
5. Mokaya, Nyauma. "New Historicism Theory" https://www.academia.edu/31830797/New_Historicism_Theory
6. Patil, Yojana. Value Education: Need of the Hour, Pasaaydaan Foundation, 2015.
7. "Value-Based-Education in Nepal"- paper by Dr. C. M. Yogi - Founder - Society for Value Education (SVE) has nicely compared Education with the Value-Based Education.
8. Important of Education in Personality Development <https://targetstudy.com/articles/importance-of-education-in-personality-development.html>

9. William, Morris. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. American Heritage Publishing Co;Inc. 1993