

# Education in the Harry Potter Series

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i  
hrvatskog jezika i književnosti

Karolina Juretić

**Obrazovanje u serijalu o Harryju Potteru**

Završni rad

Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

Osijek, 2021.

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## **Abstract**

The Harry Potter series is, among other things, a story of an educational institution. The aim of this paper is to analyze the education system presented in the series and whether such a system would be deemed acceptable in real life. Teaching and learning activities are a frequent occurrence in the series, which is a mandatory feature of a school narrative. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is just one out of eleven long-established wizarding schools worldwide. Located in Scotland, it resembles British public and boarding schools in many ways. The paper focuses on different educational aspects, from the selection process, admissions letter, and the sorting of the students into one of the four houses to the curriculum, subjects, exams, grading system, and life after graduation. It concludes with the discussion of advantages and disadvantages of Hogwarts education.

**Keywords:** Harry Potter, school narrative, education, Hogwarts, curriculum

# Table of Contents

- Introduction..... 8**
  
- 1. The Harry Potter Series as a School Narrative ..... 9**
  
- 2. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry ..... 11**
  - 2.1. *The Similarities Between Hogwarts and British Public and Boarding Schools..... 11*
  
- 3. Education and the School System in the Harry Potter Series ..... 13**
  - 3.1. *The Selection Process of Hogwarts Students ..... 13*
  - 3.2. *The Admissions Letter and the List of Necessary Books and Equipment ..... 13*
  - 3.3. *The Sorting Hat..... 15*
  - 3.4. *Curriculum ..... 16*
  - 3.5. *Subjects..... 17*
  - 3.6. *Extracurricular Activities..... 18*
  - 3.7. *Exams and the Grading System ..... 19*
  - 3.8. *Professors ..... 20*
  - 3.9. *Life after Hogwarts..... 21*
  
- 4. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Hogwarts Education ..... 23**
  - 4.1. *The Advantages of Hogwarts Education ..... 23*
  - 4.2. *The Disadvantages of Hogwarts Education..... 24*
  
- Conclusion ..... 27**
  
- Works Cited..... 29**



## **Introduction**

The Harry Potter series is one of the most well-known school narratives in the world as Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry plays a central role in the novels. Hogwarts is a wizarding school located in the Scottish Highlands and it was founded during the tenth century by two wizards and two witches – Godric Gryffindor, Salazar Slytherin, Rowena Rawenclaw, and Helga Hufflepuff. Hogwarts is just like any other boarding school, but with a touch of magic. Certain regulations need to be followed, students are divided into houses, there is a certain hierarchy within the school, children are separated from their parents, and the curriculum structure is in line with the contemporary school curriculum. J. K. Rowling's approach to education is exceptionally conformist as her education structure is designed to support a very traditional kind of education, with the emphasis on formal learning and teaching (Eccleshare 89). Traditional school stories do not put much emphasis on the actual classes and education, but the Harry Potter series deviates in that sense from the usual school story.

The opening chapter of the paper will present the Harry Potter series as a school narrative. It is followed by the second chapter that brings a brief insight into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and the similarities between Hogwarts and British public and boarding schools. The third chapter will provide a description of the education and the school system presented in the series as the focus will be on the selection process of Hogwarts students, the admissions letter, and the division into Houses with the help of the Sorting Hat. Furthermore, the same chapter will provide a closer look at the curriculum, subjects, extracurricular activities, exams and the grading system, professors, and life after Hogwarts. The last chapter will be dealing with the advantages and disadvantages of Hogwarts education, starting with three criteria of why Hogwarts is a competent school, which will then be followed by three criteria of why it is not as adequate as it should be.

# 1. The Harry Potter Series as a School Narrative

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry plays a central role in the Harry Potter series as a school/education story. School stories provide “a complete world in which children are both powerful, at least in small ways, and protected” (Eccleshare 37). Although there are certain rules and regulations, which are to be followed just like in any other boarding school, Hogwarts allows the powerfulness of the children considering the emotional aspect. Children are away from their parents who provide emotional support; however, the distance from their homes creates freedom “from the emotional complexities of parent-child relationships. Instead, their emotional energies are poured into intense friendships and enmities with children their own age” (Eccleshare 38). School stories set in boarding schools are a common occurrence in literature and J. K. Rowling manages to properly exhibit such a school drawing on conventions of rules, hierarchies, and sport obsession (Eccleshare 38). Usually, traditional school stories do not put much emphasis on the actual classes and education; yet, one notices the deviation from that school story characteristic in the Harry Potter series. Education plays an important part, especially hands-on learning, while the theoretical approach is frowned upon, which can be seen in the students’ reaction to Professor Umbridge’s lectures: “Wands away and quills out... Many of the class exchanged gloomy looks; the order 'wands away' had never yet been followed by a lesson they had found interesting” (Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix* 239). Education is important because it represents Harry’s possibility to defeat Voldemort, which means Harry’s education requires “that he learn[s] the ways of the wizarding world, but also that he learn[s] to use magic effectively” (Tally 43), which ultimately shapes the lessons into “the source of vital information which is then used in real adventures” (Eccleshare 41). When it comes to the characters in the series, Rowling manages to create individuals that “fit readily into the hierarchical relationships on which both real and fictional schools are predicated” (Eccleshare 40). Harry’s story is primarily a narrative of his education both at Hogwarts and in the wizarding world generally (Tally 41). In terms of the structure, “the series contains a few of the basic elements of the generic school story pattern, though in a way that revises rather than conforms to the genre norm” (Hiebert Alton 210). However, one might say that the Harry Potter series conforms to the generic conventions of school stories since it depicts day-to-day schooldays as they are, filled with studying, practical jokes, mischief, and sports (Hiebert Alton 211). In addition, house system and house rivalry

are one of the principal characteristics of the English school novel genre, not just a unique feature of the Harry Potter series (Gunder 294).

## **2. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry**

Hogwarts is a wizarding school located somewhere in the Scottish Highlands and it was founded at some point during the tenth century (“The Origins of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry”). The school was founded by two wizards and two witches – Godric Gryffindor, Salazar Slytherin, Rowena Rawenclaw, and Helga Hufflepuff. “They built this castle together, far from prying Muggle eyes, for it was an age when magic was feared by common people, and witches and wizards suffered much persecution” (Rowling, *The Chamber of Secrets* 143). The persecution was the reason why Hogwarts was concealed with charms so that the castle cannot be visible to Muggles. The four Hogwarts Houses are named after the founders and each house represents a certain set of values that the founder of that particular house praised: “Gryffindor students embodied bravery and chivalry; Rawenclaw, intelligence and wit; Hufflepuff, loyalty and fair play; and Slytherin, the values of being sly and cunning” (“The Origins of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry”). Each house has an emblematic animal – a serpent for the sly Slytherins, an eagle for the intelligent Rawenclaws, a badger for the loyal Hufflepuffs, and a lion for the chivalrous Gryffindors. In the beginning, the founders worked together in harmony; however, a division began to grow between Slytherin and the others: “Slytherin wished to be more *selective* about the students admitted to Hogwarts. He believed that magical learning should be kept within all-magic families. He disliked taking students of Muggle parentage, believing them to be untrustworthy” (Rowling, *The Chamber of Secrets* 143). The difference of opinion between Salazar Slytherin and the other three founders resulted in the forthcoming frequent outbursts of Slytherin’s students’ hatred towards fellow Hogwarts students whose both parents are not wizards.

### **2.1. The Similarities Between Hogwarts and British Public and Boarding Schools**

There are certain rules and regulations that are to be followed in Hogwarts, just like in any other boarding school. Another similarity that has already been mentioned is the division of students into houses, which resembles an organization of British boarding and public

schools. Once a student becomes a part of a certain house, they do majority of their activities – attending classes, eating their meals, spending their free time – with the students from the same house. Furthermore, Hogwarts has a selection criteria just like the British public schools during the Victorian age, “but rather than accepting students from particular social or economic spheres, the criteria to be accepted at Hogwarts is simply that students must be wizards; whether they are from Muggle or non-Muggle backgrounds is irrelevant” (Hiebert Alton 210). Another characteristic of a boarding school is the hierarchy within it, which can also be seen in the Harry Potter series. For instance, Harry goes from the “new boy to school hero and even savior” (Gunder 295). Also, just like in the actual English public (i.e. private, secondary, boarding) schools, Hogwarts also has prefects, which are older students in charge of conduct and tutoring of younger students in their dormitory (Britannica). If one does become a prefect, they put themselves in a great position for the future Head Boy or Head Girl title. Another common boarding school feature is the children’s removal from their parents (Eccleshare 50). Hogwarts students only go home for the holidays and over the summer. Harry, as a rare example, spends his holidays in Hogwarts; however, actual boarding schools are usually closed during that time. Next, Harry’s school list with the necessary items for the upcoming school year “captures the flavour of all such school lists” (Eccleshare 51). Moreover, the addition of new subjects after two years at the school and national tests, O.W.L.s and N.E.W.Ts that mirror the assessments of GCSE and A levels, are in line with the contemporary school curriculum (Eccleshare 93-94). In addition, even the structure of Hogwarts represents a familiar characteristic of British Victorian public schools, with the combination of “towers and turrets, the leaded windows, the cliff-top setting... Emblematically, too, it adheres closely to the popular school traditions with the school being identified by a heraldic crest displayed on a shield accompanied by a Latin motto” (Eccleshare 52).

### **3. Education and the School System in the Harry Potter Series**

J. K. Rowling's approach to education in the series is particularly conformist as her "educational structure, content and assessment are all designed to shore up a very traditional kind of education" (Eccleshare 89). Rowling puts a lot of emphasis on formal teaching and learning but also applies knowledge of the current educational system, which enables her to make the Hogwarts depiction an exceptionally telling and humorous mirror of reality (Eccleshare 89).

#### **3.1. The Selection Process of Hogwarts Students**

After Hogwarts was established, the four founders placed a book bound in peeling black dragon-hide in a small tower, which has never been visited by the students, and beside the book a small silver inkpot with a quill (Rowling, "The Quill of Acceptance and The Book of Admittance"). These are the Quill of Acceptance and the Book of Admittance and they constitute "the only process by which students are selected for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry" (Rowling, "The Quill of Acceptance and The Book of Admittance"). The child will be admitted to Hogwarts only if their name has been inscribed in the book, which happens when the child first exhibits signs of magic. However, the Book will refuse to be written in as long as it does not receive sufficient enough proof of magical ability within the child (Rowling, "The Quill of Acceptance and The Book of Admittance"). Whereas the selection process for Hogwarts students is almost non-existent, in real-life schools, students often have to work extremely hard to get accepted. Also, certain schools care about the economic and social position of their future students, which is then just another insurmountable obstacle in the way.

#### **3.2. The Admissions Letter and the List of Necessary Books and Equipment**

Every child with their name written down in the Book of Acceptance receives a letter before the first academic year in which the student is informed of their admission to Hogwarts. The letter also states the date of the term's beginning on September 1<sup>st</sup>. It is necessary to confirm the acceptance by July 31<sup>st</sup>. "The letter inviting Harry to Hogwarts comes from Professor McGonagall, not from Dumbledore, as if he is above the administration of the process of admissions" (Eccleshare 91). Some children and parents do not know of Hogwarts and the magical world's existence until the letter arrives. This does not resemble a real-life school admission process since parents are usually the ones who choose which school their child will apply to. Not knowing that the school exists before finding out about their own child's acceptance to it would realistically be a drawback. Moreover, inside the letter is a list of all the necessary books and equipment. "Harry's first encounter with the magic world itself is on his shopping trip to Diagon Alley with Hagrid" (Eccleshare 51). The list of all the necessary items starts off with a uniform. As Rowling states in the *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, first-year students are required to buy three sets of plain black work robes, one plain black pointed hat for day wear, one pair of protective gloves, and one black winter cloak with silver fastenings (66). Also, all the pupils' clothes need to have a name tag. Furthermore, the list of required books for the first academic year is given with eight books completing the list. Other equipment includes a wand, a cauldron, a set of glass or crystal phials, a telescope, and a set of brass scales. Students may also bring a pet, either an owl, a cat, or a toad. A warning to parents, at the end of the list, declares that the first-year students are not allowed to own broomsticks. Students receive a list of necessary books and equipment before the beginning of each academic year. All in all, although the economic and social position does not matter in the selection process, the position of Hogwarts students on the social/economic ladder is accentuated at the beginning of each academic year since students are required to buy books and equipment (if the equipment from previous years is not serving them well anymore), which costs enough to make financially less fortunate families struggle, for example the Weasleys: "'That lot won't come cheap,' said George, with a quick look at his parents. 'Lockhart's books are really expensive....' 'Well, we'll manage,' said Mrs. Weasley, but she looked worried" (Rowling, *The Chamber of Secrets* 48). In order to purchase the necessary items, they must turn to second-hand shopping.

### 3.3. The Sorting Hat

First-year students must be sorted into one of the four houses upon their arrival to Hogwarts:

“Welcome to Hogwarts” said Professor McGonagall. “The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your Houses. The Sorting is a very important ceremony because, while you are here, your House will be something like your family within Hogwarts. You will have classes with the rest of your House, sleep in your House dormitory, and spend free time in your House common room. “The four Houses are called Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin...At the end of the year, the House with the most points is awarded the House Cup, a great honor. (Rowling, *The Sorcerer’s Stone* 107-08)

The Sorting Ceremony’s main component is the Sorting Hat, which is one of the most intelligent objects in the magical world, enchanted by the founders to continue the sorting process after they are gone (Fouque 75). It “contains the intelligence of the four founders, can speak (through a rip near its brim) and is skilled at Legilimency, which enables it to look into the wearer’s head and divine his or her capabilities or mood” (Rowling, “The Sorting Hat”). Each house is an embodiment of certain traits that its founder considered eligible in a student. Based on that, the Sorting Hat decides where each student would fit best. However, the family legacy and student’s inner power also contribute to the Sorting Hat’s decision making (Birch 114). The sorting ceremony results in an intense bond to the House, which in time is accompanied with high spirit of competition and a high risk of divisiveness (Ciaccio 36). The sorting into houses is problematic because of the rivalry it causes from an early age. As Hogwarts students are shaped by the experience in their house during their most formative years, they grow up into adults who endorse the views and values associated with the house they belonged to (Fouque 75). Even the Sorting Hat is aware of the fact that his duty leads to lifelong rivalries among former Hogwarts students due to the house system division (Fouque 75): “*Though condemned I am to split you/ Still I worry that it’s wrong, Though I must fulfil my duty/ And must quarter every year/ Still I wonder whether sorting/ May not bring the end I fear . . . And we must unite inside her/ Or we’ll crumble from within*” (Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix* 206-07). Children are from such a young age told where they belong because of



who they supposedly are. Their belief in the validity of the house system based on personality criteria in all probability shapes them into individuals who are actually just a product of a centuries-old division plan, which pushes certain beliefs and ideas of self on impressionable young minds.

### **3.4. Curriculum**

Rowling depicts magic in the Harry Potter series as an element of nature, not as a supernatural trick. Mastering magic is extremely hard, which results in having to go through a tough and rigorously thorough curriculum at a particular school (Ciaccio 35). The curriculum at Hogwarts is ritualized in the sense that the ritual of testing “drives learning and signifies what it means to get an education” (Birch 115). One may notice that students learn mostly outside the formal classroom surroundings, in their everyday adventures. The actual studying, usually done by Hermione, is often not as important. Understandably, Harry and his friends do learn from their teachers, but it usually happens outside the formal curriculum and classroom surroundings, in a more private manner (Birch 117). For example, Snape agreed to teach Harry private Occlumency lessons, Lupin agreed to teach him private lessons about the Patronus Charm, and Dumbledore gave Harry private lessons about history of Hogwarts by introducing him to the Pensieve, a device used to look at memories. It is important to keep in mind that the majority of students have little contact with Dumbledore, who is one of Harry’s biggest sources of knowledge, so “for most Hogwarts students, it’s what they learn – or fail to learn – in the classroom that makes the greatest difference in their lives” (Bassham 236). One may conclude that Harry was getting a special treatment in an educational sense because of his position as the Chosen One in the fight against Voldemort. Although that is unfair from an academic point, the justification can be found in his important role when it comes to defeating the dangerous wizard. Furthermore, lessons are usually organized for smaller groups and are cooperative. The curriculum grows throughout the seven-year academic journey, which replicates real-life education. Each academic year ends with exams, which are to showcase the accumulated knowledge over the year, while homework is a common occurrence throughout the year, often with immensely specific requirements, such as the length of the parchment (Eccleshare 93-4). One may say that Hogwarts’s formal curriculum is “too narrow and vocational” (Bassham 236), and the reasoning behind that is the complete focus on magic-

related subjects. In addition, Hogwarts is free of tuition, as Rowling has stated in one of her tweets in 2015.

### 3.5. Subjects

If Hogwarts students were attending a Muggle British boarding school, they would have a variety of different subjects, ranging from English, history, mathematics to science, geography, music, and physical education. However, they only learn about magic at Hogwarts (Bassham 235). Starting with the first academic year at Hogwarts, students must take seven subjects: Transfiguration, Potions, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Herbology, Charms, History of Magic, and Astronomy. The second-year students are given a list of additional subjects to choose from during the Easter holidays for their upcoming third year, while the previously mentioned seven subjects remain as well. For their third year, students must choose two new subjects out of five: Arithmancy, Divination, Care of Magical Creatures, Muggle Studies, and Study of Ancient Runes. In addition, the “specialised subjects such as Alchemy are sometimes offered in the final two years, if there is sufficient demand” (Rowling, “Hogwarts School Subjects”). After the fifth year, students can drop certain subjects and continue listening only to those that are necessary in their pursuit of a certain career. For example, Harry wanted to become an Auror, so after his fifth year he kept the subjects that are necessary for him to become an Auror in the future:

“Defense Against the Dark Arts, I suppose?” “Naturally,” said Professor McGonagall crisply...“I would also advise Transfiguration, because Aurors frequently need to Transfigure or Untransfigure in their work... Then you ought to do Charms, always useful, and Potions... as for Defense Against the Dark Arts, your marks have been generally high . . . Professor Lupin thought you showed a pronounced aptitude for the subject, and obviously for an Auror... (Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix* 662-64)

During the fifth year, each student meets up with the Head of their House to discuss their future career and which subjects to pursue in order to be on the right track for a certain job, as it can be seen in the above quote, which depicts Harry’s meeting with Professor McGonagall. It is crucial to note that the majority of these subjects provide Hogwarts students

with lessons in which they are truly acquiring knowledge necessary for their future careers and lives in general. Moreover, foreign languages are not as emphasized as they are in actual education; yet, Latin is pivotal since many spells in the Harry Potter series are similar to or exactly the same as Latin words for the desired effect. For instance, “Lumos” spell comes from the Latin word *lumen*, meaning “light,” and as a result of such spell a light appears at the top of the wizard’s wand. Similarly, “Nox” spell comes from the identical Latin word that means “night” or “darkness,” and it results in extinguishment of a wand’s light (Colbert 121). All in all, the complete focus on magic-related subjects results in a previously mentioned narrow curriculum, which does not allow students to fulfil their potential in life spheres outside academia, especially with regard to self-development, since such matter is stimulated through a liberal curriculum that Hogwarts lacks.

### **3.6. Extracurricular Activities**

At Hogwarts, there are all types of extra-curricular activities at hand, whether the student is “academically-minded, sporting-inclined or just really bothered by the subordination of house-elves” (“Which Was the Best Hogwarts Club to Be a Part of?”). Firstly, there is a Dueling Club, which was created by Professor Gilderoy Lockhart, and its purpose is to teach the students how to defend themselves. Secondly, there is the Quidditch team whose members would be considered athletes in the real-life schools. Furthermore, S. P. E. W., also known as the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare, is the club to be a part of if one wishes for equality in the wizarding society. Moreover, the Slug Club is a creation of Professor Horace Slughorn. This club praises social hierarchy, precisely the top of it. The members are, as considered by Slughorn’s standards, the elite. Once these students are out of Hogwarts, they still keep in touch with Slughorn, which means an array of privileges for him. Another important club is Dumbledore’s Army, which was initiated by Hermione, but with Harry as the leader. The purpose of the club was to teach the students how to protect themselves, similarly to the Dueling Club. The club was founded during the time of Ministry’s refusal to accept that Voldemort has returned. As a result, the Ministry of Magic started to interfere in Hogwarts’s ways of teaching, which is why the students took the matter in their own hands. Finally, there are some other, less prominent clubs such as Gobstones Club and Charm Club. The importance of extracurricular activities lies in a couple of different

domains. Firstly, belonging to certain clubs requires from students to go through the knowledge already acquired in lessons, ultimately leading to an improvement of said knowledge. On top of that, these extracurricular activities require from students to experience new circumstances that will help them grow as individuals since they are partaking in something that deviates from classic lectures or leisure time, although the surroundings and the people are the same.

### **3.7. Exams and the Grading System**

At the end of the each academic year, Hogwarts students have exams, both theoretical and practical, that they need to pass in order to continue their education. During the seven-year academic experience, the students must take O.W.L.s (Ordinary Wizarding Levels) and N.E.W.T.s (Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests) as the highest levels of examination at the end of their fifth and seventh year respectively. These national tests mirror the assessments of GCSE and A levels (Eccleshare 94) and because they are extremely hard, one must start preparing for them even before the academic year of taking them starts:

All the fourth years had noticed a definite increase in the amount of work they were required to do this term. Professor McGonagall explained why, when the class gave a particularly loud groan at the amount of Transfiguration homework she had assigned. “You are now entering a most important phase of your magical education!” she told them, her eyes glinting dangerously behind her square spectacles. “Your Ordinary Wizarding Levels are drawing closer –” “We don’t take O.W.L.s till fifth year!” said Dean Thomas indignantly. “Maybe not, Thomas, but believe me, you need all the preparation you can get! (Rowling, *The Goblet of Fire* 233)

O.W.L.s are extremely important because they affect the range of jobs one can apply for later in life. Students must do well in their O.W.L.s in order to take necessary N.E.W.T.s for their desired future careers. Furthermore, O.W.L.s are spread over two successive weeks during which the students “sit the theory exams in the mornings and the practice in the afternoons” (Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix* 708). Several measures are taken in order to prevent cheating during exams and the preceding studying process is extremely stressful: “All

the fifth years were suffering from stress to some degree, but Hannah Abbott became the first to receive a Calming Draught from Madam Pomfrey after she burst into tears during Herbology and sobbed that she was too stupid to take exams and wanted to leave school now” (Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix* 605-06). Moreover, the letter with the results is received in July and each letter has the grading system at the beginning of it. There are six grades in total – three pass grades (*Outstanding* (O), *Exceeds Expectations* (E), and *Acceptable* (A)) and three fail grades (*Poor* (P), *Dreadful* (D), and *Troll* (T)). Each professor demands a certain grade in an O.W.L. in order to accept a student for their N.E.W.T.s. The examiners are not Hogwarts professors, but “a small group of ancient-looking witches and wizards” (Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix* 710).

### **3.8. Professors**

Professors at Hogwarts are, for the most part, treated with utmost respect and courtesy by the students. Their dominant position is evident in not just the students’ behaviour towards them, but in other aspects of teaching (and simultaneously living) there, such as sitting at a high table at meal times. Their only contact with students is as teachers, not as carers. Professors maintain control through giving or taking away of house points and infliction of detentions (Eccleshare 89-90). The school is led by the headmaster Albus Dumbledore. Both him and the professors at Hogwarts “assume the onerous responsibility of supervising the transition of each young student from novice to competent and independent practitioner of witchcraft and wizardry” (Conn 1176). Hands-on experience is vital to learning and professors such as Lupin and McGonagall employ this system of education. One may notice that the two of them, however, have an entirely different approach to their lessons. Whereas Professor Lupin is extremely approachable and easy-going, Professor McGonagall is quite strict and serious at all times. However, both are willing to help their students without degrading them in front of the class. On the other hand, Professor Snape’s “humiliating, antagonistic, threatening manner” (Partin 139) of teaching does not bode well for an overall nurturing learning experience. For example, after Neville Longbottom melted another student’s cauldron in Potions class, Snape snarls at him: “Idiot boy!” clearing the spilled potion away with one wave of his wand. “I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire?” (Rowling, *The Sorcerer’s Stone* 129). While pointing out

Neville's foolish mistake, Snape did provide necessary information useful for the future performance, but "the unsupportive delivery of this feedback is unlikely to create the necessary psychological climate for change" (Conn 1179). Furthermore, successful professors are imaginative, which, as a result, motivates students. For example, Professor Flitwick illustrates this statement when he injects a sense of theatre in his Charms lesson in which he made Neville's toad move around the classroom (Conn 1179). In contrast, Professor Binns's History of Magic lectures are fact-driven and extremely dull, which in turn demotivates the students to pay any attention to what he is saying. The ultimate role model is Dumbledore, who recognizes the students' potential, respects both academic and non academic staff, and is sympathetic towards all people no matter what their background is. On top of that, his goal is to instil in his students the importance of using their magical skills wisely (Conn 1179). Such an almighty presence leading Hogwarts is crucial since Dumbledore, the most powerful wizard of his time, brings a sense of safety in surroundings that are often dangerous. All in all, most teachers at Hogwarts are stereotypically presented as "stock caricatures" (Birch 104), from their behaviour and appearance to the subjects they teach. For example, Professor McGonagall is highly intelligent and rational, but also quite strict. Her physical appearance supports her strictness. Yet, her strictness does not originate from an evil personality; on the contrary, it is a matter of a loyal personality (Birch 108-09). To conclude, images of teachers at Hogwarts "can be divided or easily categorized: morally good or evil; wise or incompetent in their area of expertise; lenient or strict in terms of school discipline; and capable or inept pedagogically" (Birch 105). Doubtlessly, such categorization can also be applied in real-life schools, which are just as adequate and inadequate with regard to hiring professors.

### **3.9. Life after Hogwarts**

Children start their first year at Hogwarts at eleven years old and graduate at seventeen years old. Graduation at such young age makes one wonder whether higher education exists after Hogwarts or do the soon-to-be former students immediately find a job? Both is possible. Although established institutions capable of replacing real-life universities do not exist in the Harry Potter series, certain career paths require further education of some sort, for example Aurors and Healers. To become an Auror, one must go through Auror training, but to even enter the training programme, one must have a minimum of five N.E.W.T.s and nothing under

“Exceeds Expectations” grade. Professor McGonagall explains this to Harry during his career advice session in his fifth year: “‘Well, you’ll need to demonstrate the ability to react well to pressure and so forth,’ said Professor McGonagall, ‘perseverance and dedication, because Auror training takes a further three years, not to mention very high skills in practical defense’” (Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix* 664-65). The career of a Healer also requires further training after Hogwarts for which one needs “at least an E at N.E.W.T. level in Potions, Herbology, Transfiguration, Charms, and Defense Against the Dark Arts” (Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix* 656). However, a lot of career paths do not require any additional training, which is evident in Fred and George’s and Percy’s case. Fred and George did not graduate. They left in the middle of their final year, which did not stop them from opening up their own business – Weasleys’ Wizarding Wheezes. Percy got highest grades in his N.E.W.T.s and started working immediately after graduation for the Department of International Magical Cooperation in the Ministry of Magic. Aside from becoming an Auror or a Healer, there are other prominent career paths such as a Ministry of Magic official, a teacher, a wandmaker, a curse-breaker, a writer, a pub landlord, a professional Quidditch player, a dragon keeper, etc. To elaborate on some of the careers, becoming an Auror means working in one of the most dangerous fields in the magical world, considering their job is to catch Dark wizards. This career option is the equivalent of United Kingdom’s MI5 or MI6 agents. Furthermore, aside from the Department of International Magical Cooperation and the Auror office, which is a part of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, there are other offices and departments as well in the Ministry, such as the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes and the Department of Magical Games and Sports, just to name a few. Evidently, the Ministry of Magic functions just like real-life ministry. Writers and pub landlords are very appealing career paths to the wizarding community, which relies on them for personal and social entertainment (“Pottermore’s Guide to Wizarding Careers”). Moreover, just like Muggle sportsmen, professional Quidditch players are seen as “heroes and celebrities to the wizarding world” (“Pottermore’s Guide to Wizarding Careers”). To conclude, there is a wide variety of career options in the wizarding world, many of which exist in real life as well. However, it is questionable how well the students are prepared for their upcoming careers since only some require additional training.

## **4. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Hogwarts Education**

### **4.1. The Advantages of Hogwarts Education**

The philosopher John Dewey, as one of the most influential thinkers in American education, criticized traditional education for its “stress on passive listening, rote memorization, undemocratic values, and disconnect with practical, real-life concerns” (qtd. in Bassham 228). Dewey advocated a teaching approach that emphasized hands-on learning, building on the natural interests of children, and connecting schoolwork to everyday life (par. in Bassham 229). These three components likely assure deeper understanding of the schoolwork and effective application of the knowledge in the future. Education at Hogwarts reflects all three ideals. Firstly, students come to Hogwarts to learn magic, which is why Hogwarts is a successful school, because the majority of students masters spells and potions needed for them to be considered competent wizards and witches. On top of that, the majority of students passes their O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s and graduates as proficient magicians (Bassham 229). Such an accomplishment is a result of the hands-on learning technique, which ultimately allows students to recognize the importance of what they are learning through practice as something they will actually use in their life after graduation. It is important to emphasize that they do not learn so effectively through listening to Professor Binns’s or Professor Umbridge’s extremely boring and purely theoretical lectures. Theory itself is important, but without the practical part supporting it, students attending what should be skill-based subjects, such as Professor Umbridge’s Defense Against the Dark Arts, cannot fully grasp the depth of the theory provided. That is why students learn to do magic better in “apprenticelike way that typically involves (1) demonstration of a magical technique by a skilled teacher, (2) practice of the technique by the students, (3) individualized coaching by the instructor to correct faults, and (4) continued practice by the students until the technique is mastered” (Bassham 229). A prime example would be Professor Lupin’s classes in general, but more specifically his private lectures for Harry on how to conjure a Patronus. In these lectures, Professor Lupin provides Harry with necessary information on how to successfully conjure a Patronus while specifically targeting Harry’s weak spots in achieving the goal. Another example is Harry Potter himself teaching fellow students defensive magic as a leader



of Dumbledore's Army. There is an obvious resemblance between Harry's teaching approach and the one he received by Professor Lupin, as both approaches embody the hands-on learning technique through the combination of the four above notions. Both Harry and Professor Lupin demonstrate what needs to be taught, which is then followed by students' continuous practice until the technique is mastered. Also, both of them assist the students throughout the lectures in order to correct any mistakes. "Given that magic is portrayed in the Potter series as a hard-to-acquire skill that can be mastered only through coaching and practice, this kind of teaching makes perfect sense" (Bassham 229). Furthermore, in relation to building on the natural interests of children, Dewey believed that children are naturally curious, which resulted in his urging the educators to "use kids' natural interests and real-life experiences as hook to encourage learning" (Bassham 230). Evidently, Hogwarts students love magic and they understand its practical importance, not just for passing the exams, but for their future careers and everyday life as well, which is why they organized Dumbledore's Army after Professor Umbridge forbade practise of the defensive magic in the scope of the Defense Against the Dark Arts (Bassham 230). Finally, Dewey believed that classwork should be considered a part of life, not "a preparation for some remote and speculative future" (Bassham 231), it should not be considered a pointless obstacle in the way of real life. Often, many pieces of information students learn are not useful, which results in "inert" knowledge, as philosopher Alfred North Whitehead called it, which is essentially the "lumps of undigested, untested, unused information" (qtd. in Bassham 231). As Bassham states, some of the things students learn in Hogwarts could be described as inert; for example, Professor Trelawney's "bogus crystal-ball gazing" and Rubeus Hagrid's lessons on "raising ugly and dangerous Blast-Ended Skrewts" (231). However, the majority of what students learn in Hogwarts is practical and necessary knowledge for their future lives and they are able to recognize that, which results in eager students willing to learn.

## **4.2. The Disadvantages of Hogwarts Education**

Not everything is satisfactory about Hogwarts, which can be seen in three major negatives Bassham states: the school is too dangerous, there are too few qualified teachers, and students do not get a well-rounded education (232). Firstly, Hogwarts is quite a dangerous place to go to. It is located next to a magical forest that is filled with hostile creatures, there is

a lake next to the castle that is a home to a giant squid and “treacherous water demons (grindylows)” (Bassham 233). In the school, “mischievous resident poltergeist” (Bassham 233) Peeves is known for constantly purposely sabotaging students, especially those who are late for class: “He would drop wastepaper baskets on your head, pull rugs from under your feet, pelt you with bits of chalk, or sneak up behind you, invisible, grab your nose, and screech, ‘GOT YOUR CONK!’” (Rowling, *The Sorcerer’s Stone* 123). Another thing one should look out for are the vanishing steps that students need to remember in order to jump over them. In the close proximity of the Forbidden Forest is the Whomping Willow, a violent tree in the middle of the school grounds. Quidditch, which is the most popular game both at Hogwarts and wizarding world in general, is also very dangerous, often resulting in serious injuries to players (Bassham 233). Also, students sometimes work with dangerous magical creatures and with potions that “often go awry and injure or disfigure students” (Bassham 233). On top of all that, even the youngest students constantly carry “potentially lethal weapons (wands) that they regularly use to hex and jinx one another” (Bassham 233). However, it is important to clarify that many injuries can be healed remarkably fast by Madame Pomfrey’s nursing care and Professor Snape’s potions (Bassham 233). Nonetheless, such surroundings most likely have somewhat of a negative impact on students because their natural curiosity will push them to explore the possible adventure-like locations on the school property, ultimately leading them to dangerous situations. Moreover, unqualified teachers are a common occurrence at Hogwarts, which is a result of the wizarding world having no certification requirements and teacher education programmes. Ultimately, that means that anybody can teach at Hogwarts, “including those with little or no formal education” (Bassham 234), such as Hagrid. Of course, there are competent teachers, such as Albus Dumbledore, Minerva McGonagall, Remus Lupin, Pomona Sprout, and Filius Flitwick; however, there are also teachers with “significant shortcomings” as Bassham (234) states, such as previously mentioned Hagrid. Although Hagrid is knowledgeable, he exposes his students to extremely dangerous situations. Furthermore, Snape is certainly a qualified teacher in the sense that he is highly knowledgeable in his area of study, but he is also a bully “blatantly biased in favour of Slytherin students” (Bassham 234). Four substandard teachers are Binns, Sybill Trelawney, Gilderoy Lockhart, and Dolores Umbridge. Binns’s lectures are extremely dull and he behaves as if there are no students in his class. Trelawney makes “seemingly false and random predictions about unfortunate events in students’ lives. Unlike Binns, however, Professor Trelawney’s reclusive and aloof behaviours and personality, not age or death, distance her from students” (Birch 105). Lockhart is “a narcissistic and ineffectual blowhard”

(Bassham 234), whereas Umbridge is “a twisted, power-hungry racial supremacist who tries to undermine any effective education at the school” (Bassham 234). Without necessary teacher training and credentialing procedures, the poor quality some teachers bring to Hogwarts will stay the same (Bassham 234). Finally, if Hogwarts students attended a Muggle British boarding school, they would have a variety of subjects, from English, Mathematics, and Science to Geography, Art, and Music. However, they only learn how to do magic at Hogwarts, which makes for “a narrow and vocationally oriented education” (Bassham 235). Appelbaum agrees with Bassham, stating that the adventures are the real curriculum; otherwise, “the education at Hogwarts seems fairly empty” (88). As Bassham states, an educated person should be able to think critically, write and speak well, and have a good training in the humanities and sciences that form the basis of a liberal education (235), which intends to “impart the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to fulfil one’s human potential; to understand and appreciate the supreme productions of human thought and art; and to live a rich, full, and vibrant life” (Bassham 236). Such foundation for a liberal education should be provided by a competent secondary school. There are no universities in the wizarding world, which means that it is vital for Hogwarts professors to encourage their students to become lifelong learners (Bassham 236), yet Hogwarts fails in that sense too. Harry and his friends are not taught “to love reading or ideas, to think scientifically, to appreciate art and literature, or to reflect in an informed and disciplined way about the problems of society and the human condition” (Bassham 236). Of course, knowledge acquired outside the classroom is important; however, Hogwarts’s formal curriculum is too narrow and vocational. The reason why liberal education is so important is because it liberates the mind in different ways, from enlarging person’s perspective to freeing it from ignorance and the limitations of one’s surroundings (Bassham 236). Hogwarts fails to provide wide-ranging knowledge, the intellectual skilfulness, and proper character righteousness that a good school should grant to its students (Bassham 237). “Because of the narrow vocational education they receive, Hogwarts students are ill-equipped to deal with the many problems that confront wizarding society” (Bassham 237), which is evident in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* when Hermione states that it all stems from “this horrible thing wizards have of thinking they’re superior to other creatures” (Rowling 171).

## Conclusion

J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series is one of a kind writing that "juxtaposes elements from countless literary traditions – from the *Bildungsroman* and the fairy tale, to the classic boarding-school story or the supernatural thriller – and combines these allusions over seven increasingly intricate novels" (Harris 19). In the series, education plays an important role, especially hands-on learning, which results in a narrative of Harry's education both at Hogwarts and in the wizarding world itself (Tally 41). In terms of the structure, "the series contains a few of the basic elements of the generic school story pattern, though in a way that revises rather than conforms to the genre norm" (Hiebert Alton 210). Hogwarts is similar to the actual British public and boarding schools and Rowling puts a lot of emphasis on formal teaching and learning, but also applies knowledge of the current educational system, "which enables her to make the parallel at Hogwarts a particularly telling and funny mirror of reality" (Eccleshare 89). Only a child who possesses magical ability can be selected as a Hogwarts student, which mirrors the reality of schools often having selection criteria. First-year students need to be sorted, by the Sorting Hat, into one of the four Houses upon their arrival to school. The sorting ceremony results in an intense bond to the House, "a strong identity that creates a high spirit of competition, together with, however, a high risk of divisiveness" (Ciaccio 36). Furthermore, the curriculum at Hogwarts is ritualized in the sense that knowledge is tested, but students also often learn outside the formal classroom surroundings, in their everyday adventures. The curriculum grows throughout the seven-year academic journey, which replicates real-life education. Students must take exams at the end of the each school year, as well as O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s, exams on a national level similar to the assessments of GCSE and A levels. O.W.L.s are extremely important because they affect the range of jobs that one can apply for later in life. Students must do well in their O.W.L.s in order to take necessary N.E.W.T.s for their wanted future careers. Although there are not any established institutions that would replace real-life universities, certain career paths require further education of some sort. Moreover, Hogwarts offers hands-on learning, which proves to be the preferred way to study, as students did not learn so effectively when listening to Professor Binns's or Professor Umbridge's extremely boring and purely theoretical lectures. Furthermore, Hogwarts students love magic and they understand its practical importance, which results in eager students willing to learn. However, some aspects of Hogwarts education are not so satisfactory, which can be seen in three major negatives Bassham states:

the school is too dangerous, there are too few qualified teachers, and students do not get a well-rounded education (232). Hogwarts students learn through their adventures, outside of the classroom environment, which means the studying often does not matter. “At Hogwarts, bravery and magic powers, friends and connections, physical prowess on the broom, and sheer luck matter much more than intellectual and academic achievement” (Birch 117).

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