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# Recent Research in the History of Education in Hungary



he political changes in 1989 - 90 opened new paths in educational policy in Hungary. Both educational theory and practice hoped to get new incentives in a free, pluralistic society.

As far as history of education is concerned the most important change in research is a *shift to special topics*. A great deal of studies published and research conducted concentrate on some clearly distinguishable topics. The preferences of these research areas and some present problems in education are clearly interrelated:

1. There is a growing interest in researching educational issues of the *after-war* period. The recent past as a period of historical interest poses many problems stemming from the fact that this kind of research has a direct influence on the present. It concerns persons involved in the educational developments of the past forty years. After a long period of compulsory ideological indoctrination there is a sound reassessment of the theory and practice of educational events and more unbiased handling of problems in education after 1945. History of education has a role to reveal facts suppressed from political reasons as well as to deal with educational issues from a problem-centered point of view. This latter

statement concerns, for example, a detailed survey of the educational policy in the socialist era concentrating on an objective treatment of issues instead of emphasizing the ideological aspects. It means throwing a new light upon questions like curriculum policy, public education, teacher training etc. To illustrate this trend of research the following *selected* items can be mentioned:

- At the University of Debrecen Professor László Vaskó deals with the educational system of minorities in Hungary 1945 - 1961. He is also engaged in researching great Hungarian educational politicians in the 20th century.

- A research group at the Institute of Educational Research employs an educational sociological aspect to describe the paradigms of educational policies characteristic of Hungary in the 60s and 70s. In his book Professor Tamás Kozma gives an international outlook on trends of educational policies and Hungarian developments.<sup>1</sup> Here educational policy is described from the point of view of children, the teachers, the parents, and the state.

- A good example of the interest in the recent past is a historical overview of the Hungarian higher education after 1945.<sup>2</sup> It analyses the quantitative development and the structural changes that took place in the past decades. Once again the present needs to renew the system of higher education turned the attention to a historical analysis.

Yet one must bear in mind that some new aspects of researching these problems had been already discussed before the political changes took place in 1989 - 90.

2. The historical research of *denominational schools* has also a direct link to present educational problems in Hungary. Before the war the Hungarian school system was characterized by most of schools owned by the churches. The socialist system "nationalized" most of the

denominational school thus cutting age-long traditions of education. Recent educational policy encourages the churches to lay a claim on some of their old school buildings, where, in some cases, teachers created new traditions of education. Thus, a conflict of religious and public interests is inherent in this situation. The conflicts, however, resulted in a growing attention paid to the old traditions of schooling, to the once famous schools run by the Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran or Jewish communities.

This growing interest in the traditions of old schools is further connected with the fact that history of schooling has been the most cultivated aspect of history of education in Hungary. Almost every settlement has history of its school/s written by local teacher or by an enthusiastic inhabitant or even by a well-known historian or educator. Some of these school histories are based on well-documented scientific research, some are just chronicles to keep traditions to the coming generations. This trend in researching history of education is now continued by evoking the spirit and practice of famous denominational schools. The research in this area is mainly a descriptive one concentrating on revealing documents of the schools or, in the recent past, recollections of sometime teachers, old pupils. Yet one can also find deeper analysis of this field, e.g., an article giving an overview of the history of state schools and denominational schools in Hungary.<sup>3</sup>

3. Another research field in the history of education bound to present problems and interests in Hungary is the issues of national and international aspects of *child-centered education*. When the establishment of schools ceased to be the monopoly of the state, forming schools went back to the roots of the "New School" movement, to the theory and practice of child-centered education at the turn of the century. This research field had already been cultivated by Hungarian scholars. The present needs,

however, to show alternatives in educational practice and theory turned attention to Rudolf Steiner and the Waldorf schools, to Freinet and Montessori and other representatives of the "reform pedagogy". Among the vast amount of literature a series of articles by Professor András Németh, Teacher Training College, Eötvös Loránd University, can be mentioned.<sup>4</sup> He analyses the emergence and spreading of the reform pedagogy. Here the interest in child-centered education in Hungary gets a historical background. Some aspects of these articles have never received a scholarly treatment in the history of education in Hungary. He reviews the alternate school models throughout Europe in the 80s thus giving an answer to present day Hungarian interest in the mentioned questions.

The trends shown above do not mean that the interests of Hungarian historians of education are restricted to the mentioned fields. Yet it is striking how these three groups of topics have emerged as overwhelming ones. Other fields of interest in history of education involve history of childhood, historical aspects of curriculum design, teachers and society. There is also a trend to publish short biographies of well-known Hungarian educators.<sup>5</sup> A new history of education textbook for teacher training students has been published by Professor Béla Pukán-szky, József Attila University, Szeged, and Professor András Németh.<sup>6</sup> This synthesis covers Hungarian and international history of education from the ancient times to the present. One of its greatest merits is the incorporation of latest historical trends, e.g., history of childhood, into history of education as a teaching subject.

There are preparations to research the educational aspects of our national traditions to the 1100th anniversary of the coming-in of Hungarian tribes in 896. There will be a series of cultural events in 1996 including financially supported history of education research presentations and publications.

Finally I would like to present an outline of my course in history of education at the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

### **An Introduction to the History of Education** *A course planned to teacher training students*

History of education both as a research field and a teaching subject has undergone considerable changes recently. The most important development seems to be the broadening of the field of history of education, which suggests a shift from the narrowly institutional approach, from the history of schooling toward more widely conceived historical interpretation of educational thoughts, events, and phenomena.

This tendency is described by European as well as American scholars. Antoine Leon, for example, while summing up the trends of history influencing educational historians mentions the following aspects as relevant ones to modern history of education:

- the enlargement of the field of interest by consideration social and psychological history as well as by widening the scope of history with the most distant past and the present: it means incorporating family history, history of childhood, history of mentalities into the subject area;

- the replacement of narrative and descriptive history by "problem history": it means more emphasis on conflicts and on evolution of educational ideas and phenomena. (Antoine Leon, *The history of education today*. Paris: UNESCO, 1985 p. 14.)

Trying to construct a new history of education an American scholar, Rudolph Schnell mentions three aspects that markedly broaden the traditional school-centered approach:

- history of education as psycho history: in this century "scientific psychologies have offered experimental and analytical means for examining and explaining human behavior". The different psychological frameworks opened new fields, e.g., family history, history of childhood;

- history of education as interpretation: this aspect is an integrative one in the sense it uses the first two aspects as "sources of new historical evidence and assumptions and as historical laboratories for the testing of historical logic out of which historical interpretations... are constructed." (Rudolph Leslie Schnell: "Sources for Constructing a New History of Education" in R. F. Lawson, V. D. Rust, and S. M. Shafer (ed's), *Education and Social Concern*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Prakken Publications, 1987 p. 35-47.)

Nevertheless, these developments of research field have not been and are not wholly reflected in history of education as a teaching subject. (Robert Sherman and Joseph Kirschner, *Understanding History of Education*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1976.)

As a teacher of educational history at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, I have become more and more convinced that a history education based on narrative issues and on the traditional interpretations of school history does not offer a meaningful framework for understanding the evolution of educational phenomena and thoughts. My concept in teaching history of education concentrates on the shaping and transmitting of values. A broadly conceived idea of human values contains the ways of thinking about human knowledge, attitudes, behavior, in short, what is thought to be important in bringing up successive generations. Thus the value concept I follow in this course comprises formal and informal education, cultural transmission throughout history. This process inherently contains conflicts while interpreting and transmitting values.

In this sense, an introduction to the history of education follows a chronological outlook with special attention to the evolution of value transmission in a given historical period. It is assumed that this approach can incorporate the new trends and findings in history of education mentioned above, and can serve as a starting point for more detailed studies in the field.

An outline of the course is as follows:

- Ancient Greeks. The changing values in the periods of Greek history. Sophistic philosophy, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. Ancient Romans: the conflict of Greek and Roman values. The emergence of Christianity in view of new human values.

- Middle Ages. Links to ancient Greeks and Romans. Formal and informal education reflecting a religious concept of values. Christianity and philosophy: a synthesis of human knowledge and faith. The concept of man and child in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance.

- Reformation and Counter-reformation. The change in the religious interpretation of man and world. The growing role of formal education: types of school emerging from the 16th century and transmitting new sets of values.

- Theory of the evolution of human knowledge and its educational implications: religious belief and empirical, rationalist thinking: Francis Bacon, Descartes, and Comenius. The transition from medieval to modern schooling.

- The age of Enlightenment. The new interpretation of "human understanding" (Locke); scientific methods applied to the relationship of man and society; the new concept of childhood in the works of Locke and Rousseau; work as social and individual activity and its growing importance among human values; social sensitiveness as a value reflecting changing social requirements (Pestalozzi); the growing role of the state in education, the emergence of the national school systems.

- Science and religion at the turn of the 18th and 19th century. The new humanistic approach to human values. Kant, his moral ideas and its effect on Herbart. The birth of educational science as a systematic body of knowledge.

- The emergence of the child-centered approach in educational theory and practice: its antecedents, scientific, social, and psychological factors leading up to the "New School" movement; the comparison of traditional and new schooling in view of values reflected in formal schooling. The contribution of Ellen Key, Decroly, Claparède, Dewey, Montessori. Non-directive approaches and interpretations of human behavior: Neill and the free child, Carl Rogers and the encounter groups.

## **Summary**

This article argues that history of education as a research field is closely connected to the present problems and interests of education in Hungary. This statement is proved by showing how historical research is related to special topics:

- educational issues of the post-war period
- historical and present interest in denominational schools
- historical and present aspects of child-centered education.

The brief outline of these mentioned points is followed by a history of education course description to show how the latest historical trends are incorporated into history of education as a teaching subject.



## References

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