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ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

Mihai Tropa

Babes-Bolyai-University Cluj

Abstract: *The present article is a reflection upon certain aspects of the Romanian educational system and the imprints left upon it by the totalitarian political system before 1989. In this sense it shows how the perpetual changes and mutations to which Romanian education was subjected in the latter years are eroding the fundamental values constituting the background of the free development of human beings. At the same time, the paper constitutes a mode of action, being part of the official documentation for the accreditation of a Master program to be offered by the Faculty of Psychology and Sociology, The West University of Timișoara.*

Keywords: *master program, Romanian educational system, alternative pedagogies*

1. Mission of the Master Program

The interdisciplinary Master Program: „**Master în pedagogie Steiner-Waldorf**” (M.P.S.W. — Master in Steiner-Waldorf pedagogy) is organized within the domain of Educational Sciences. It is mainly a complementary type of masters, also intended at deepening the pedagogical studies. Its mission is defined in the broader range of the reformation process of the Romanian educational system, with the precise intent of offering support to the main purpose of reform, that of centralized structure and strategy, oriented of necessity from top down. This is done by a precise component of the *reform in the subtle zone of pedagogy*, created by the human quality and the moral authenticity of the teacher-student relationship, the basis of any educational activity.

The merit of Steiner-Waldorf education (as an “alternative” pedagogy, based on an integral approach that covers all levels of instruction, from pre-school kindergarten to the academic level of adult education) is defined by the perseverance and the conceptual stability by which it addresses aims that have in the meantime become those of the so-called traditional education also (which is, by its nature, “eclectic” by necessity). These aims come from the general view on *the human being who is in a continuous evolutionary process* that requires of itself a *holistic approach* of the education and formation process. This can be done by the *truthful centeredness on the student*, by fostering *interdisciplinary* and *transdisciplinary* processes which are specific to the *project-based teaching activity*. Adding to this are the fruitful results of a pedagogical culture that has timely understood *the importance of affective and volitional structures of the human psyche* and has thus consolidated and amplified its own *cognitive approach*.

The current transfer of methods and processes between alternative and traditional pedagogy is just of a passing character, dictated either by the momentary necessities or the evident success implied (a good example could be the introduction of pupil assessment in the form of word qualifications instead of number marks in primary school) and therefore *a part of the mission* of the M.P.S.W. is to offer the framework for a unitary and rhythmical sharing, for the common benefit. The striving of those who care for the formation of the younger generation in schools and universities should be continuously sustained and completed by an offer of new instruments and methods, considered an enrichment of the didactic repertoire, in the sense of an *ongoing professionalizing process*.

2. The Necessity of the Programme

2.1. One of the main fields of pedagogy is that of major strategies, meant to ensure the continuous existence of the social organism in its already validated forms. This is also the area in which the educational activities are linked to the domain of culture, ensuring their visibility.

The identity of the teaching institutions, either taken as a part or as elements of a network, is mainly a result of the above mentioned strategies. But we have to do here with the energies of tradition, with the stability of values and an assuredness concerning the time perspective. These characteristics are inherent to a linear-historical image that is very predictable, a natural thing for the mentioned strategic field.

2.2. The *scientific character* as such of the education and formation process is not offered by the cultural strategies, but by the specialized humanistic sciences on the pedagogical level: psychology, anthropology and sociology — thus naming only the most evident.

On the other hand we need to understand the following aspect: only this scientific character can give pedagogy the *necessary autonomy* that allows it to make use of an internal dynamics that is conform to its precise activity field, the *free development* of the human being. From the exclusive point of view of cultural strategies, pedagogy can be easily instrumented, and the factors of instrumentalisation are not always in favor of its essential subject.

The instrumentalisation is still a natural process that we should not worry about, as it is continuously accompanied by its polar process, the *re-centering* of the pedagogical activity on the coordinates of *the developing human being*. This re-centering can be made aware of in certain periods as a necessary refreshing, refueling of pedagogy starting from the *ideal of the human model*.

2.3. One thing is for certain: the efficiency of a society is ensured by the measure in which its schools respect and sustain the free and harmonious

development of human individuals, less from semi-political emulation, but rather as a conscious step of pedagogy in *taking over spiritual responsibility*. This should be based on a scientific knowledge of the human phenomenon. The major cultures of Europe, mainly responsible for the historic evolution of modern civilizations, have always taken care of ensuring their solidity and efficiency by respecting the individual and one of the means of fulfilling this goal has always been by the educational sciences.

2.4. From the above mentioned we notice that in pedagogy there is an *active component*, composed by the concentration on its essential working theme — the general human being —, and a *reactive component*, that allows pedagogy to always find its place in the requirements of an ever changing society, by means of strategic reactions.

2.5. Depending on its cultural quality, a pedagogical system has at its disposal different paradigms that allow it to follow its tasks. One of them, namely the *scientific paradigm*, could be thus represented:

perception — *thought* — *action*

and corresponds to an active, autonomous position of the respective system, thus giving it the necessary consistency at the moment it is forced to have a reactive, adapting attitude. But the repeated reactive attitude can engender sometimes another type of paradigm, namely the *projection paradigm* that could be represented by the following:

impression — *representation* — *action*.

The ideal situation of pedagogy would suppose a decisive prevailing of the first paradigm: this could allow the existence of a continuously efficient education that would trigger the unfettered manifestation of the individual potential, for the social welfare.

2.6. An educational system that tends to become mainly reactive results in a society that is characterized by weakness and lack of true perspective and the preconditions of individual development are substituted by a semi-conscious activity of confiscating the capacities of the younger generation. Under certain historical conditions, this situation can continue even during long periods of time.

Expressed more radically: such a system would opt, at the moment, for the creation of specialized human tools for the use of the corporations (or would surrender its own function to them as a sign of maximum lack of potency), instead of taking care of the formation of strong, autonomous, creative individuals who are capable of complex, specialized communication as required by the modern society.

2.7. Thus we have to do with a risky situation that is specific to all so-called “former communist” countries. The transition from a state of ideological conditioning is quite easy — and extremely unfavorable — into one of economic and social conditioning, when the spiritual basis of the problem of *human dignity and the right of development of the human being* is not touched in a proper, scientific manner by pedagogy.

One of the impediments is the fact that the living notions of: *human being*, *humane-ness* and *human development* are continuously ideologically marked in the collective memory, sometimes to such an extent that the search for exterior solutions to their reference area is preferred.

Another impediment is of a more complex nature: *the image of the human being*, used as a basis of work in the educational field, has suffered a cut, a cleavage. Thus is perpetuated the insisting reference to the cognitive zone of the human psyche and there still do not exist truly adequate instruments for an education that could approach in a forming manner the *emotional-affective* and the *volitional* component.

These fundamental components, if left in the hands of consumerism and its mass media manipulations, have known a rapid decomposition that threatens the interior cohesion of the being, thus generating unwanted phenomena that are sometimes hard to keep under control: aggressiveness, emotional weakness, primitivism or indifference. Another effect, on a larger time scale, is sickness.

2.8. The main effect on an emotional-affective level of the mentioned cleavage is a continuous imbalance between the states of *sympathy* and *antipathy* (if they are getting overstressed, even between sentimentalism and cruelty), lacking the chance of the vertical *self-awareness*. On the level of will, the balancing is between *hyper-activity* and *burn-out*, but there is lacking the chance of the *well-done deed*.

The confiscation of the cognitive element is not ensuring for it a natural, harmonious evolution either, but brings it also into a degrading process. When it gets a quality of non-beingness, the cognitive component of the human psyche gets at first into a phase of *relativisation*, of coming out of the natural course, in which anything can be anything. The next step is the *instrumentalisation*, coordinated by exterior — and often alien — factors to the human model. The last phase is that of *automatisation*, of forced assuming of thought sequences

that strongly impede upon the possibility of a further development of the capacity of knowledge. In other words, the *qualitative, moral* and *individual* aspects of thinking, seen as necessary evolution steps in human biography, do not get a real chance of existing. The same lack of chance has the development of *creativity* as a state of dignity of the cognitive element, as an expression of the entire being in its area.

The disagreeable results of the mentioned cleavage are, on the cognitive level, “knowing” without “acknowledging”, and “thinking” without “reflecting”.

2.9. One can see that the above described states are the result of a lack in the perception of the integral character of the human being or, in other words, the result of a severed perception, the consequence of a cleavage in perception. As follows, the parts of the being are either conducted by separation (the case of the cognitive component) or mainly neglected (the case of the emotional and the volitional components, of whose correct development depends the further development of social capacities and competences).

To epitomize this defective process: what follows is the lack of a true perception of human individuals, that leads to the refusal of freedom and, implicitly, to a weakening of the being.

2.10. *The traditional coordinates of education, still mainly oriented towards the cognitive structures, require thus a natural reunification in the direction of a pedagogical culture that should equally take into account the affective and the volitional structures of the human psyche.*

3. The Objectives of the Master Program

The contemporary society is in a transformative process with exceptional dimensions and dynamics and therefore the professional training of the teaching staff needs deepening and consolidating in order to allow the school *an authentic and even more complex articulated integration in the concrete life of the community*. In a world that is undergoing change, the profiles of the pedagogical professions are also meant to evolve and differentiate, even up to the change of paradigm, by gradual transformations.

The M.P.S.W. considers reaching in time a greater *depth* and *diversity* of the professional profile in the fields of pedagogy, to the benefit of the already existing Romanian Waldorf schools and of the graduates of B.A. programs who intend to dedicate themselves to the teaching activity. The M.P.S.W. also offers a thoroughly structured opportunity of *professionalizing* and *improving* of all the teaching staff who is already active, who perceive this necessity and grow an interest in the values of a modern, open pedagogy. This is conceived as a *space for meeting and dialogue* among innovating tendencies in the traditional pedagogy and the creative character that has been developed throughout the

past century in the Steiner-Waldorf pedagogy. Its intention is to avoid clichés, routine, formalism and dogmatism that can impede on the living process that is specific of the pedagogical work in general. The M.P.S.W. is inspired by the *spirit of continuous research and learning*, which is natural and necessary in the extremely complex context of our contemporary society.

4. The Specifics of the Master Program

The M.P.S.W. reaches its goals by the activated contents in the context of its tuition and practice program, by the interdisciplinarity of the concept on which it is based and by the intense accent on the scientific character of the pedagogical study. Furthermore, the M.P.S.W. respects following requirements, meant to strengthen its specificity:

I. *The artistic exercise in the formation process* is a part of the cognitive-theoretical component of any study and gives integrative access to the emotional and volitional mechanisms, as well as to the subtle domain of *creativity*. Thus it becomes a prerequisite for the metamorphosis and the extension of the intellectual capacities by means of the specific processes that go together with the moment of artistic creation: *imagination, inspiration* and *intuition*. The tuition by means of the artistic practice can use variants of music, visual arts, movement arts like eurhythmy, as well as the instruments of rhetoric as part of the arts of speech.

The complementary element of artistic exercise is, naturally, *the harmonious physical exercise*, for example Bothmer gymnastics, meant to provide for the bodily vigor and discipline. The value of the physical exercise in the context of contemporary daily life makes a special argumentation superfluous.

II. The present school *can be open and have among its teachers representative, successful personalities from the local community*. They bring the experience of a specific domain in which they are proficient, sustained by an outstanding human quality that is specific to those who have found ways of creative fulfillment in their biography and who act strongly by means of *the strength of their personal example*. In order to prepare this step, the teachers can benefit during their study by the opportunity to *exercise their moderator skills* that are even more necessary nowadays in a social surrounding that require more and more a differentiation and professionalization of the communication process.

The natural corollary of the opening of the school towards the community and which has already been practiced in the contemporary teaching systems is *the project development for the real use of the community*.

III. The basic gesture of the individual tutoring that is strongly imprinted in the profound tradition of all contexts and levels of pedagogy can be completed by the *exemplary activity of the fruitful cooperation in the act of teaching*. We can again make use here of the *power of example*, this time in the sense of process. Learning the cooperation and team-work skills is often only formal when school time is over, but also wearisome and costly. This lack can be successfully avoided by the timely presence of the act of cooperation as a component of the teaching methods, thus allowing the *informal impulse of socialization through useful activity* to become an *explicit forming principle*.

The teaching by cooperation is endowed with a complementary instrument by the organization of *activity groups on preferential or vocational domains*. Their value can be grown by their integration as a distinct part in the tuition process, which needs a deepening of the tuition techniques for group activities, as a component of the pedagogical study.

IV. A teacher who is capable of continuous training through artistic practice is prepared to dedicate himself to a *pedagogy of the human model* when he starts a process of *individual conscious and assumed development*. This is also furthered in his professional training by the spiritual techniques of *meditation* and *contemplation*, as means of support in his continuous activity of *active self-education* that is an essential condition of teaching. The creation in time of a *personal artistic profile* in the broader sense of the *art of education* can be a good result of this striving.

Mihai Tropa teaches pedagogy, alternative pedagogies and psychology at the Babes-Bolyai-University Cluj-Romania. He is also an editor at the *edition tertium* Stuttgart/Germany. He translated Romanian philosophy and published different books in the field of visual arts and Steiner's pedagogy.

E-mail mihai.tropa@ubbcluj.ro