

**COMMON FEATURES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE EDUCATIONAL
CONCEPT IN THE SOCIALIST COUNTRIES OF EASTERN EUROPE**

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1. Introductory remarks

The expansion of formal education as a prevailing trend of industrial society from the late fifties to the early seventies, has recently been encountering in Western industrial countries ideas and indications of future plans which seem to show a trend running counter to this. Here it is a question of signs of a departure from that general expansion of formal education which dominated the aims and measures derived from them, during those decades. This change is caused directly by the phenomena of economic recession and the financial consequences of these, which have forced the school authorities on a national, regional and local level to make drastic economies and expenditure on staff and materials.

That it is so far-reaching and not to be seriously stopped by improvements in the economic conjuncture is, however, also connected with the fact that faith in the power of educational policies and pedagogical processes to change society, on which the reforming policies of the sixties and early seventies were based, has been drastically shaken. The disillusioned expectations of the responsible policy-makers and educationists, as well as of major parts of the public, are expressed not only in criticism and cancellation of partial reforms, but also in fundamental doubts of the sense of a continuous extension of compulsory school attendance and of an expansion of formal education in general, though such counter-concepts, of course, are not generally accepted, nor have they been uncontested. Anyway, the view hitherto held of the close interrelation of the educational^{and} economic system, especially in reference to the relationship between the structure of qualifications and of occupations, is being questioned.

We must also include in this connection the ideas and propositions which aim at an "uncoupling of study and work"¹. These do not indeed necessarily include a departure from the strategy of expansion but even point to the continuation of it, in that they emphasise the liberation of educational policy and pedagogical aims from economic exigencies. Since however they express at the same time fundamental doubts about the interrelationship of the educational and the economic system, they can be interpreted from the point of view of educational economies as an argument of restrictive educational policy.

If, knowing this problem situation, one analyses the present programme statements of the party and governmental leadership from the socialist countries of Easter Europe², the educational policy measures codified in laws, regulations and decrees, and the practice in the schools, as far as it is documented in situation reports and in the results of empirical investigations, one is not confronted by analogous crisis phenomena. The validity of the theses, derived from Lenin's pronouncements, on the necessity of a school rigidly organised and to be expanded, which has been translated into action in the Soviet Union since the beginning of the thirties, and which has also determined school development in the other socialist countries since the end of the Second World War, has nowhere been limited. Critical comments which have been made during the past decade, in a more or less distinct form, in official and semi-official documents in the various socialist countries, have never passed the Rubicon towards criticising the education systems as such³.

If one looks for a system-based justification for this basically different situation, one comes across to arguments which recur constantly in the official statements and writings and which influence educational policies and educational theory directly.

According to one, the necessity, derived from the foundation-superstructure model of historical materialism, of making continual economic growth the basis of social policy demands the orientation of educational policy to the national economy's growing need for work force. Pragmatic aims which are directed towards a rise in the standard of living, which is lower in comparison with the West, as well as the politically and ideologically determined wish to "catch up with the West" show themselves in this connection as an intensifying motivation. In the second argument the pedagogical optimism which has its roots in the conviction that upbringing contributes to the realisation of the "new man" combines with the undiminished value attached to a scientific education, which is understood as being the acquisition of the scientific disciplines structured in and transmitted by the universities and centres of research (academies), and which contains in itself the justification of a school system in which essential significance is accorded to the systematic gaining of knowledge.

It is not to be wondered at that in the socialist countries, in face of these basic arguments, discussions which are held in the West about a "deschooling of society" as well as about the experiments and experiences of "open schools" (of various kinds) are commented on critically and, as a rule, polemically. In articles and essays appearing regularly, the ideas of Ivan Illich and other theories of de-schooling are interpreted as an expression of an anarchist view covering up the individualistic lack of cohesion symptomatic of declining capitalist society⁴.

2. Common features

In the educational theory and practice there is reflected the fundamental affirmation of a strategy of expansion in arguments

and procedures which I introduce and interpret in this paper as characteristic features of the "socialist education system" (in its significance as a social sub-system). Together with these features I want to pick out as examples phenomena and procedures which may be recognised in all national variations (as in "education systems" in the educational policy sense).

(1) The statements of educational theory are derived from the Marxist-Leninist social doctrine: From the quality of this doctrine as a "scientific ideology", it is claimed, all those questions may be substantially posed and fathomed which concern human beings in their relationship with nature, with society and with themselves, according to Marx's definition of man as the "ensemble of social circumstances"⁵. As an important assertion the socialist theory of education emphasises the "unity of education and upbringing". The recognition of this principle includes the co-ordination of specific aims, contents and methods with each of the two concepts. By "education" stress is laid essentially on the initiation and advancement of the acquisition of knowledge and of the cognitive abilities, while the concept "upbringing" (in the more restricted sense of the word) embraces the transmission of affective qualities (relationships, attitudes, interests, convictions), social qualities and values. On the other hand for example, for the Soviet Union L.V. Zankov has presented the neglect of the non-cognitive processes of learning as a deficiency in socialist didactics, and has demanded that in class teaching - and not only in the educative work done outside the class room and outside the school - a "methodical system" must come into use that is based on the principle of "totality."⁶ Starting from operationalising and practising the concept "upbringing", V.A. Suchomlinskij resulted in analogous conclusions⁷.

(2) The principle of "unity of theory and practice" represented in the Marxist-Leninist social theory is crystallised in the reality of what happens in education and practice in the postulate that the theoretical determination of educational aims and the contents and methods to be derived from them is to be of immediate service in the mastery of educational practice, and the latter for its part can claim the "objective" answer to the questions being asked in the concrete historical situation.

(3) On the one hand the dovetailing of the authorities for theoretical education and political exercise of power in the central organs of the Party and State leadership binds the pedagogical practice and theory to the directives of a state educational policy, which for its part is to be understood as an element of comprehensive social policy. On the other hand equal consideration should be given to the contrary trend, that educational policy seeks its aids to decision both in models of educational theory and in empirical examinations of educational practice.

In the socialist education system the degree of commitment in educational policy decisions, which for example are contained in the official pronouncements of the highest organs of Party and State (Party Congress decisions, etc.) and semi-official publications (in particular in the press) is intrinsically higher than is the case with corresponding manifestations in Western countries, even when their educational policy is directed centrally. On the other hand we must not fail to recognise that also the pressure to achieve results in educational policy is greatest where the highest organs of control unite in their own hands the planning and the carrying-out of reforms.

All determinations of aims in the pedagogical and the educational policy sphere are orientated according to one of the central tenets of the Marxist-Leninist social theory, which asserts that the bringing about of communism goes along with the bringing up of the human being (emancipated from alienated work, material need and political doctination) - who is "new" and "universal". From this central tenet there results the commission, contained in all present-day educational strategies, to ensure the training and upbringing of the "socialist personalities" who are on the one hand ready to defend the already attained objectives of their countries and of the whole socialist system of society that have already been attained, against "counter-revolutionary" attacks, and on the other hand are making their own the qualities of conduct which anticipate as far as possible the virtues of the "new man" and of the foretold communist society. In this - in the light of the Marxist-Leninist social doctrine - humanist and emancipatory aim is the foundation for the intention of educational policy-makers and pedagogues in the socialist countries to create and develop schools as institutions of socialist personality building.

At the same time, however, the education system is confronted with the second task, namely the education of "workers" (in the widest sense of the word) who are efficient at their jobs. The young (and adult) people are accordingly to be qualified to meet the requirements, in the epoqe of the "scientific and technical revolution" (this term having been recently modified and thus reduced to "scientific and technical progress"), of continually changing tasks in the production process, which also demands the readiness and capacity for permanent availability.

3. Problems concerning the implementation of goals

The socialist theory of education looks on both tasks mentioned in the preceding paragraph, as being dialectically related to each other. Here it refers to the "foundation-superstructure" model of historical materialism, postulating that technical and economic development must be accelerated, so that together with this development social conditions can change and on this basis the consciousness of human beings can attain new qualities. For educational policy this means: Schools must be organised and shaped that in them young people can acquire knowledge in its function as a force of production which is becoming more and more important. Together with this, there must be an insurance that in the teaching and educating process the guiding idea of the efficient "work" is related to that of the "socialist personality". The pragmatic task must therefore be merged in the humanist objective. According to the conception of lifelong education and upbringing, this postulate includes adults as well.

However, in the conversion of both tasks from the formulating of educational theory and educational policy decision into educational practice, objective contradictions can be seen which are either common to all national variations or come to light in specific forms.

In the sphere of educational economics these contradictions are seen for example in postponements of planned school developments because of demographic changes which had not been taken into account (e.g. increase and decline in school populations in an educational administrative area) and because of financial deficiencies in the resources supposed to be provided by the state and - within guide-lines fixed by the state - industrial and agricultural undertakings for the educational system.

In the didactic sphere the contradictions concern firstly the competition of general educational aims with the aims of instruction specific to subject disciplines or to age-groups, which arises naturally because of the fact that the student's time available for work is limited even when great demands are being made. Efforts to make the conflict of teaching aims fruitful leave their mark in class timetables, in directives about the content and teaching methods of individual subjects as well as in experiments in the drawing-up of interdisciplinary instructional units. Furthermore we should refer to the order of precedence of the individual teaching aims within age-groups and subjects, e.g. with regard to the possibility of combining traditional and modern specific positions, to the range of information to be taught and to the relationship of visual presentation and abstract penetration in the choice of contents and methods.

The contradictions mentioned show factors which can be traced back, within the system, to differences in the rate of development (e.g. in the extension of compulsory and secondary schooling), in way of solving problems (e.g. in the fixing of the number of weekly lessons for individual subjects, in particular with transitions from six-day to five-day periods) and in attendant features (e.g. in the organisation of initial and in-service training for teachers) without the dialectic co-ordination we mentioned of the two educational tasks needing to be fundamentally affected.

On the other hand, we are led to the limits within the system by the basic question of how far in the education systems of socialist countries there is success in conforming to the guiding principle of the efficient "worker" and of the "socialist personality" to the extent that conflicts which arise are understood by the teachers, by the students, as well as by everyone else involved in the process of education

and upbringing either as subjective conflicts only, or as objective deficiencies which will disappear with the bringing about of communism.

As soon as this substantial field of the problem of conflicts is touched on, the interpreter is confronted by the following observation: On the one hand the schools in the socialist countries are places of education and upbringing in which the virtues of the "new man" are to be anticipated, such as intrinsic learning, love of work and collective behaviour. On the other hand they are defined as institutions aiming at achievement, whose individual school leaving diplomas are given essential importance for the attainment of professional qualifications (on the various levels right up to graduation from higher education and qualifying diplomas in the tertiary sphere of education) as well as for the attainment of material income and status in society.

The perception of this problem leads in particular to our turning our attention to phenomena which show that the principle of achievement linked with rates of economic growth and materials on ideological privileges is not only tolerated by and even employed explicitly as a stimulus to economic development (including private initiative, e.g. agriculture in Poland, "second economy" in Hungary) and also educational assessment (in form of marking systems). From this point of view the regulations and procedures of examinations are clear indications of the value of the principle of achievement (understood in this sense) in present-day development.

To give a representative example, the characteristic attributes of the "socialist education system" can be reflected in the programme of secondary education for all young people which is a commitment in the strategies of educational policy, though with various emphases, in all socialist countries, insofar as the efforts, which are becoming evident in the

changes of structure and didactic reforms, in the direction of an integration of general and vocational education (in particular in Bulgaria), are orientated according to the guiding principles of the efficient "worker" and of the "socialist personality".

4. National variations

In the development of the "socialist education system", among the national variations of which the fundamental common features are to^{be} established and strengthened, a significant control is played in historical reality by the Soviet Union's function as a model - with its "socialist" educational policy in existence now for almost seven decades. This statement concerns above all the "comprehensiveness" of the individual national systems which spans all horizontal stages from the child to the adult, makes possible terminal awards and traditions according to the principle of permeability and insures compulsory schooling for the great majority in non-selective "comprehensive" (unitary) schools constitutionally and in reality. Beyond that the conception of the integration of school with educational and training activities outside school merit special attention, as is demonstrated for example in the co-operation of school, family and youth organisation, the promotion of evening and correspondence courses as well as the participation of the employing enterprises in the basic training and further training of young and adult workers.

The existence of fundamental common features has shown itself in previous decades above all when Party and State leadership initiated impulses aiming at fundamental and long-term reforms. Here we think especially of the application of the "polytechnic" principle to the general education schools at the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, and of the educational measures and plans to be observed in the past twenty

years, which have had as their object the realisation of ten-year compulsory education within types of schools which give the structural framework for providing an intensive general education right to the end of schooling.

On closer view, of course, it is seen that the fundamental common features do not prevent the existence of variations which are characterised by specific types of schools and by differing delimitations of the individual horizontal stages. Here deviations from the Soviet pattern are apparent, less in the room of compulsory education than in the sphere of continuation schools preparing for entry into higher education and giving professional qualifications. Points of orientation for an explanation of such differences are reached through consideration of the following factors:

(1) In the comparison between the Soviet education system and the education systems of the other socialist countries we must take into account the duration of time of the post-revolutionary development up to the present day, which results in the Soviet Union's function as a model, to which I have already referred. We must also bear in mind the fact that the transformation of education in the Russia that became sovietised after the October Revolution was comparatively radical, while in the other countries after the Second World War there followed a step by step adaptation - speeded up of course to a greater or lesser extent by the educational authorities responsible - of the "bourgeois" school which already existed, to the new social and political conditions of the socialist order of society to be erected.

(2) The establishment of priorities in educational policy is conditioned essentially by the level of industrial development and the state of education of the population at a particular time. This factor is significant especially from the point of view of the initial conditions which prevailed when the

"socialist" period of educational history began in the individual countries and which distinguished the comparatively highly developed and established structures of the primary and secondary schools in Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic from those of the other countries which were industrialised to a lesser degree or hardly at all. The high level at the start explains for example the German Democratic Republic's lead in the building up of a system of ten-year compulsory schools and in the concentration of rural schools as well as the intensity of the didactic reforms there. On the other hand in the forties and the fifties educational policy-makers in Poland and the South-Eastern European countries had to concentrate on the extension of the compulsory school system; just as their Soviet colleagues had previously done in the twenties and thirties. But here we must also point to the inflexibility, characteristic of the policy of pursuit of uniformity in the early fifties, in which the basic features and details of the Soviet education system were imitated even when - as in 1953 in Czechoslovakia with the reduction of the basic school and of the gymnasium course each by one year - it concluded a retrograde development which, later on, has been corrected.

(3) The question of the level of the economy and the state of education directly indicate the specific "historical antecedents" of the individual education systems, which refer not only to the pre-revolutionary "bourgeois" period but also extend back into previous centuries. Their after-effects are distinguishable even today in the shape of national and supra-national traditions. Thus the Hapsburg-Austrian school policy, which can be traced back to Maria Theresa and Joseph II, and which produced noteworthy and far-reaching school reforms in the nineteenth century, has left its traces not only in the school systems of Czechoslovakia and

Hungary, but also - in competition with French influences - has left some imprint on school developments in Poland and Romania. The heritage of the czarist school is still most alive in the present Soviet school system in the intermediate technical schools (technicums) and in the German Democratic Republic .. the Prussian-German tradition in the sphere of the "dual" vocational training (apprenticeship and schooling) exists even where explicitly new paths are being trodden.

Apart from distinctive features of organisational structure and overall curriculum development, the "historical antecedents" in the existing systems show themselves particularly clearly in the way how the national history is realised and related to the overarching "socialist" theory of education and its implementation. The reference to this specific component of the educational concept deserves special attention the more so as it points the way to investigating and interpreting different patterns of value orientation and moral education. Finally, since the "historical antecedents" reveal the history of century-old interrelations with the Western part of Europe, they offer an approach to consider the present situation and the prospects of "socialist education" in the light of a wider geographical and historical dimension, because the European heritage has had its impacts on Western Europe (and, consequently, on other continents) too.

5. Concluding remarks

In the presentation of this paper the emphasis has been laid on the position education, in particular formal education, takes up inside the overall educational strategy of the socialist countries. Beyond this limitation the question arises of criteria for an evaluation, transcending the intra-systemic interpretation, which can be differentiated from a "partisan" view in the sense in which this term is used in Marxist-Leninist social doctrine, as from absolute freedom

from any value judgement. This consideration becomes relevant in the formulation of a "tertium comparationis" which, beyond the comparison, within the system, of categories that are inherent in the socialist education system raises the question of the desirability and realisability of models that might not only transcend the structures of the individual socialist countries, but also the social system foreordained for them, and could be applicable to educational strategies in all industrial states on the one hand and in the universal range on the other. However, this is a task whose tackling would go beyond the intention underlying this paper⁸.

References

- 1 In the literature on educational policies thoughts of a "liberation" go back first of all to the findings of Christopher Jencks and his collaborators at Harvard University obtained by secondary analysis and to the fiercely discussed conclusions drawn from them. Cf. Christopher Jencks, Inequality. A re-assessment of the effects of family and schooling in America, New York, 1972. "Symposium Review", in: American Educational Research Journal, 11(1974), 2, pp. 149-175.
- 2 In the present paper the term "Eastern Europe" is applied in that way it is used on the European continent, that means including the Soviet Union. It is true that the "Asian" component of the Soviet Union is not respected which, however, is of no relevance to this paper.
- 3 The most radical criticism within these limits is inherent in the document "Założenia i tezy raportu o stanie oświaty w PRL" (Principles and theses of the report on the state of education in the People's Republic of Poland) which was completed in May 1973 by an Expert Commission and laid the ground for fundamental educational reforms until 1980.
- 4 Cf. Wolfgang Mitter, "Aspekte des Verhältnisses zwischen Entschulungstheorie und marxistischer Pädagogik" (Aspects of the relation between deschooling theory and Marxist pedagogy), in: Pädagogische Rundschau, 27(1975)12, pp. 1005-1019.
- 5 Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, Werke (works). Edited by the Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, Berlin, 1956 et seq., 3, p. 533.

- 6 Cf. L.V. Zankov (1901-1982), Didaktika i zhizn' (Didactics and life). Moskva: Prosveshchenie 1968.
- 7 V.A. Suchomlinskij (1918-1970), Izbrannye proizvedeniya v pjati tomach (Selected works in five volumes). Kiev, Radjans'ka shkola 1979/80. - In this context considerable attention should also be paid to the Polish educationist Heliodor Muszyński's conception of the "upbringing school": H. Muszyński, Teoretyczne podstawy systemu wychowawczego szkoły (Theoretical foundations of the upbringing system of the school). Warszawa/Poznań: Pan'stwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1972.
- 8 The present paper is considered as a follow-up study of previous publication by the author, in particular: "On the efficiency of the Soviet School System", in: Comparative Education, 9(1973)1, pp. 34-47. - "Erziehungsziele und Probleme ihrer Verwirklichung in sozialistischen Gesellschaften" (Educational goals and problems of their realisation), in: Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. 1973, pp. 93-111 "Merkmale und Probleme einer marxistischen Pädagogik" (Features and problems of a Marxist pedagogy), in Gerhard Szczesny (ed.): Marxismus - ernst genommen. Ein Universalsystem auf dem Prüfstand der Wissenschaften. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1975, pp. 149-170. - Secondary School Graduation: University entrance qualification in socialist countries. Oxford/New York: Pergamon Press 1976; in particular pp. 29-38.