

CONTEMPORANEITY OF THE REFORMATION IDEAS OF DIMITAR KATSAROV (*First half of the 20th century*)

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Abstract. *The paper deals with the up-to-date ideas of Prof. Dimitar Katsarov for liberal education of the child in the educational space of modern EU. In that context, recommendations are made for innovations in Bulgarian state pre-school education.*

Keywords: *primary school; release; educational work; freedom; adaption; organizing the possibilities; integration of the child's personality.*

In the first half of the 21st century Bulgarian pre-school education keeps trying to find its national identity based on the achievements mainly of other European countries. Indisputably, borrowing is a trait in the development of principles in socio-culture and the reforms of the science of education is a common and dynamic process of educational interactions that began in the beginning of the 20th century and is still going on. The thinkers of education believe in and recommend the scientific search for good (positive) theory and practice examples of other countries and its adaptation to the specific national needs. Maybe the only universal condition for such transition is the prior objective analysis and scientific evaluation by successful theorists and practitioners on a national level. This context determines the *goal* of the present historical and pedagogical study which is *analyzing the reformative spirit and the contemporaneity of the pedagogical ideas of the Bulgarian scholar Dimitar Katsarov*. The main task is to characterize his original ideas for children's liberal education in the conditions of reformation of European education in the first half of the 20th century and to look into them for possibilities to modernize contemporary Bulgarian pedagogy.

To start with, we are going to pay attention to the fact that the second half of the 19th century marks the birth and beginning of development of pre-school education for Bulgarian children. On one hand, the genesis of this new pedagogical development in Bulgarian and European education at that time is happening mainly under the influence of the widely accepted Froebel Theory and on the other hand, under the influence of the Russian democratic pedagogy – mainly the ideas of K.D. Ushinski, E.N. Vodovozova and A.S. Simonovich. On this conceptual basis Dragan Tsankov created

“The theoretical model of the system for state pre-school education. In 1874 he published a series of articles in Chitalishte magazine in which he presented his ideas for ‘Rules and Regulations for Pre-school Institutions.’” (Kolev, 1996).

In the same year, Nikola At. Zhivkov made an attempt at laying the foundation for state pre-school education – as he himself points out:

“In 1874, when I was a teacher in the city of Veles, Macedonia, I made an attempt to teach a group of twenty 4-5 year old children following the example set by the ‘Rules and Regulations for Pre-school Institutions’. Although I didn’t have the necessary time or tools/toys or an appropriate place, the children took a sample exam and the observers were surprised and kept wondering how gifted the children were and how they must have been chosen from among the wisest ones while in truth they were just common children.” (Vucheva, 1998).

In the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th the state pre-school education in Bulgaria was going through a process of modernization based mainly on the model for pre-school pedagogy and developed by Friedrich Froebel and became an inseparable part of the Bulgarian system of education. The common thesis was that kindergartens (then called children's schools by Yoakim Gruev, 1879) must be public and prepare the child for school. “In the first half of the 20th century the Bulgarian children's school remained within the structure of the education system which had preserved its scientific and practical originality and national character. However, the school's conceptual basis was vastly enriched by the ideas of New Education and the main contribution to that process was made by Prof. Dimitar Katsarov – a proven follower of the Montessori pedagogy with a philosophy for cosmic education.” (Sn. Vucheva, 1998)*.

**Dimitar T. Katsarov (1881-1960) graduated with a degree in philosophy and pedagogy from Geneva University, after which he was the assistant of Prof. Edward Klapared in the same university. He returned to Bulgaria and continued his scientific research and teaching as an assistant to Prof. Petar Noykov. He specialized in a few scientific fields in which he kept lecturing as a professor - general pedagogy, experimental child psychology, pedology, methods of psychological and pedagogical research. He published a number of works including: Pedagogy as an Independent Discipline; Pedagogical Perspectives; Typical Features of the Development of the Modern Bulgarian Education Theory and Practice; etc. He was the editor of the Liberal Education magazine (1922-1944), the Bulgarian magazine for the International League for New Education. He taught a private course for the training of pre-school teachers (1934-1942) and gave qualifications to 200 girls. He gathered and taught classes of mentally handicapped children in St. St. Kiril and Methodi primary school in Sofia. (based on V. Nacheva-Petkova, 1999)*

In the spirit of the Montessori-pedagogy philosophy and the theory of L.N. Tolstoy for liberal education, the Bulgarian scholar Dimitar Katsarov saw the development of the individual not as a “passive adaptation” to certain conditions, but rather as an “active influence of his/her spiritual strength on these conditions”. In fact, the concept for liberal education is the main idea of the reformer Maria Montessori – personal spiritual strength is leading in the processes of individual development and how active an individual is becomes a main factor in his/her self development. In this context D. Katsarov emphasizes that when it comes to a child, a teacher and educational work, the main universal efforts should aim at what is the essence – ‘releasing’ the spiritual and creative strength of the child and ‘allowing’ for them to manifest. Katsarov’s main requirements are related to organizing the possibilities for spontaneous creative manifestation of the spirit of the individual in order to achieve a real creative process. According to V. Kuteva, 1997 for the Bulgarian teacher it is most important to develop simultaneously all the aspects of the individual so that it helps the individual’s ‘overall’ development and also aids to the constant ‘integration’ of his/her personality.

Even today the ideas of D. Katsarov, 1947, that the child “irrespective of everything else, is not imperfect. In every moment of his/her development, the child is a functional unity, i.e. from a biological point of view a perfect creature, adapted to the existing conditions and his/her needs.” According to the Bulgaria scholar the first and most important task of each educational theory and practice is to “see the child as such and not as a miniature adult as well as to try to define the main peculiarities of his/her nature. Because the child is not a miniature adult, who only needs time to grow.” In the spirit of his beliefs D. Katsarov recommended “allowing the child the freedom to try, act and summarize within the conditions of maximum desire and readiness to cooperate and share with others.” Therefore, a child has to be allowed to be a child, to experience a joyful childhood, to fulfill his/her needs and explore his/her interests, to experiment and gain new experiences. “The child – writes Katsarov – should be able to live a child’s life fully and joyfully as a unique individual with his/her specific needs and interests in every moment of his/her development.” (D. Katsarov, 1997: 52-55).

According to D. Katsarov, 1997, “Pedagogy as a science is not limited to a narrow school-related understanding for education, but is a complex life process in its broadest organic relation to all various manifestations of life through which education becomes a way of living.” In the manner of the Montessori method, D. Katsarov also claims that “the educational environment in principle should provide an education full of life and joy, “a stream of spontaneous manifestation of the child and his/her activities, a free opening and blossoming of the child’s nature.”” For that reason “school has to activate the child’s spirit, to challenge him/her to do creative and spontaneous work or in other words, the child does not need a curriculum made by a teacher but a true full school life in the spontaneous and rational happening of which the norm is defined by the essential educational content. In fact, education must be a real life the child leads at the moment of educational activity. (D. Katsarov, 1997: 57-58).

In that context, D. Katsarov, 1947 wrote: “educational work must be attractive and joyful for the child, it must provoke positive emotions, so that the educational process is carried out in the best possible way and the child is not by any means repulsed by him/herself.” Therefore, educational work has to be:

- Easy for the child;
- To follow the path of least resistance of the child’s psychology and physiology;
- To always be freely acquired by the child, i.e. “the child should have an appetite for it”;
- The object of the educational activity must charm the child and must wake his/her desire to learn;

- to be “as close as possible in character and form the spontaneous manifestation of the child’s natural activity – play”

Just as in the ideas for liberal education of M. Montessori, the concepts of John Dewey’s progressive pedagogy for the child as the ‘sun’ of the educational system and the theory of Jean-Ovide Decroly for “interest centers”, D. Katsarov put the child in the center of society and education – the child is the hallmark around who all thoughts and activities gravitate, the child is who also directs all efforts”. According to V. Kuteva, 1997, this is namely why he states that “an education that was considered modern in his time is child centered.” Which should be interpreted as follows: the child has the ruling place and importance amongst all the factors that the educational environment should take into consideration. There cannot be a rational education if it is not adapted to the psychological and physiological specifics of the child which means that “every child should be known thoroughly and that, of course, can only be achieved through a systematic child study.” According to D. Katsarov it is namely the results of this study of the child’s individuality that is the basis on which “all educational influences should be created.” (D. Katsarov, 1947).

D. Katsarov, 1947, believed that “freedom is not given, but it should be self-realized in educational work. The measurement of freedom cannot be assigned – but it must be the biggest possible for each particular case and must be determined by the perfection of the educational work. Hence the question about freedom in education is not about how much freedom you should give to children, but how to organize and complete the educational work to develop the highest degree of freedom, and at the same time it should be remembered that freedom is essential for education. Therefore, freedom in education is opposed both theoretically and practically to restrictions and force.” Thus, as D. Katsarov interpreted education as an active process, in the terms of reformatory pedagogy he put in first place the personal experience of the child, and his/her needs and interests. “Educational content, then, - he underlined – must not get in the way of the creative, spontaneous work of the child, but must, on the contrary, awake the spontaneous interests and spiritual energy of the child towards work, to challenge, the so called “struggle with the educational material”, so that knowledge and other educational acquisitions come naturally as well understood ingredients of the child’s constantly growing and reorganizing experience. The love that the child has for education can only be stimulated and sustained when education is organized and carried out in a way that is already described in the analysis of the educational process and, namely, when it meets the natural needs and interests of the child, answers his/her questions, which come spontaneously to the child’s mind and when it is accompanied by joy and satisfaction of these needs of the child’s nature.” (based on D. Katsarov, 1947)

According to D. Katsarov, 1947: “Education is an on-going life process, a life function which exists always and everywhere; life in its complexity influences constantly the formation of one’s personality and through this process sustains permanently the function of the education.” Since he was convinced that the educational content should by any means be pragmatic and effective as in the Montessori-pedagogy, D. Katsarov develops his own criteria for compiling educational content. The criteria are the following:

- to satisfy the needs of the growing and developing individual;
- to stimulate the activation of the child’s spiritual energy;
- to make common sense, i.e. to be related to real life in such a way that the child can feel this relation to his/her own life and the life around him/her.

“In order for the teacher to be able to find out what the student needs, what is good or bad for him/her, the student must have the freedom to express his/her attitude toward education, that is, freedom is the only criteria.” (based on D. Katsarov, 1947)

“Adaptation” of education to the child was interpreted by D. Katsarov as a growing “differentiation of children at school”, in other words – *grouping* the children in levels of development and other criteria and the placing of each group within the suitable educational framework. For example:

- a group of mentally handicapped;
- a group for gifted children;
- a group of children with physical disabilities;
- a group of emotionally unstable children;
- a group of morally corrupted children, etc.”

However, at the same time, “adaptation” of education to the child requires “its full individualization,” and by individualization of education, Katsarov understood “adaptation” of educational tasks, methods and means to the individuality of the child “so that a maximum educational efficiency is guaranteed in educational work with each child regardless of whether the work is done individually or collectively.” (D. Katsarov, 1947). For example Katsarov indicated as possible:

- grouping based on abilities;
- replacing the class system with a laboratory one;
- selection of the school subjects;
- dividing school subjects into the categories of standardized and non-standardized;
- individualization of the curriculum;
- mobile classes;
- extra individual education;
- intensive education;
- corrective education, etc. (based on D. Katsarov, 1997)

According to D. Katsarov, 1947, the most important educational interaction is love: “Before everything else – he wrote – love is the first and most powerful means that the teacher has on his/her side so that he can wake the children’s unforced and pure love towards him/herself as love leads to mutual trust without which education is impossible. The child naturally loves, when he/she feels that he/she is loved. Without this love of the educator toward the child, it cannot be expected that the child will have an attachment and faithfulness towards the teacher and you cannot expect the child to willingly listen and so you cannot guarantee the correct manner of educational influence to be performed.” Therefore, he believed that school should “be both a tool of education and an experimental field for educational work and educational work should be a multiple experiment the deductions of which allow the living organism of school to constantly grow and develop. The system of education should be a consequence of the natural conditions in which it operates, of the free relations between the factors which interact within education.”

Conclusion.

The results from this theoretical historical and pedagogical study of the reformation ideas of Dimitar Katsarov are the grounds for the following conclusions to be drawn:

- He was an organized educational thinker, an active follower of the avant garde reformers in pedagogy in their attempts to defend children’s rights, especially their right of freedom and liberal education.
- He created his own theory for liberal education of the child, which contributed to the attempts for reformation in European school;
- His ideas are up-to-date as the renovation processes in the European educational system are still looking for the ideal citizen of the world.

The goals and tasks of this study allow the synthesis of the following recommendations for a reformation in the Bulgarian pre-school education:

1. The social and educational innovations regarding national scale pre-school institutions in Bulgaria should be based on inner acceptance of the good national experience and practices in the historical process towards the perspectives we have in the EU.
2. Borrowing foreign good practices and experiences should always be interpreted through the scope of national interests, the needs of the Bulgarian family/school and the historical futurology of our people and state.
3. It is high time that modern Bulgarian education, especially Bulgarian pre-school education, reinvented itself in an education of action, active discipline for the free child who expresses him/herself without restricting others’ freedom.

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