

ESZTERHÁZY KÁROLY UNIVERSITY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

Management
Prof. Dr. Béla Pukánszky, Dsc,
Professor, Head of Doctoral School
Prof. Dr. Jenő Bárdos, DSc,
Professor Emeritus, Programme Director

Dávid Péntes

**The transformation of the educational
elite in the Rákosi era**

Thesis statement of the PhD Dissertation

Supervisors:
dr. János Ugrai associate professor
dr. István Szőköl associate professor

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Introduction

The works published over the past one, one and a half-decade clearly suggest the interest of the profession in the domestic educational history after 1945. The numerous articles, besides the books (such as (*Knausz*, 1986, 1988, 1989; *Balogh and Knausz*, 1989; *Kéri and Varga*, 2006; *Mikó*, 2008; *Kéri*, 2009; *Gécsi*, 2010; *Schweitzer*, 2011; *Golnhofer and Szabolcs*, 2013, 2014)) and some – remained manuscript – dissertation indicating the interest in the grey area of the domestic educational history.

It's a fact, however that the post-1945 Hungarian educational history is barely studied, mostly because researchers of the era are in a special situation. Because the proximity of the past renders possible appearing involuntarily distorting facts that make the assessment – above all understanding – of the events harder relating to the methodology of research in means of the ability to research and due to the personal involvement. This is particularly true for the '50s. This is partly because after the transition while consolidating the communist system primary factors were loyalty to principles and commitment, the professionalism became only secondary. Therefore, during these years there were written reports, that later on – after the '80s, '70s moreover after 1990 – were less acceptable, moreover even the authors went beyond. On the other hand, some of the researchers were once the apprentices of the examined persons thus it was unrealistic to expect the objective judgment of their previous master's labor. The difficulties regarding the ability to research are partly proven wrong by smaller or bigger monographs made about dominant scientists (professors) of the era. These monographs though generally

don't detail sensitive questions, they rather only highlight the person in the negotiation, concentrating on his labor and achievements above all.

The aim of the research

My research aimed to introduce the determined steps of the domestic educational history between 1948 and 1956 while concentrating on the history of the development and the consolidation of the new educational elite/nomenclature. The transformation of scientific public life was a result of the political turnaround in 1948 is part of this process, whose management organization with the highest degree was the Hungarian Academy of Sciences before the political changes. During the socialist transformation of the scientific management, the Hungarian Scientific Council temporarily took over the position of MTA being the management organization with the highest degree, during whose short-lived operation several significant events took place. Among others, with a soviet example, the new classification system was established (aspirantúra and candidate degree) which fundamentally changed the everyday of Hungarian science and the mechanism of the advancement on the career ladder. This mechanism also meant the selection of the new scientific upper-class

The Hungarian Scientific Council and its role is still debated, but during commissions being established while refounding the MTA in 1946 also the Educational Committee was established, whose history didn't get much attention by the educational history research. In fact, substantive work was only produced by Pukánszky Béla, who published his research in the German language (*Pukánszky, 2007*). Due to my previous studies as a political theorist and because I was

interested in the era's education policies I also wrote a moderate size study (*Pénzes, 2009*). This work matured the idea of a bigger research.

Throughout the research and writing the text I endeavored that the found data acquired knowledge applied explicitly to the science of education and where it was possible the history of education. But sometimes due to the resources I've found and how it was possible to use them, I had to study other issues too. These cases represented significant further information relating to the contemporaneous science education though thus were relevant regarding the whole thing.

I use the establishment and functioning of the nomenclature of the science of education in a wide sense. Therefore I don't focus only on who, when, and how he became a member or became excluded by political turnarounds, I was rather interested in the mechanism of the involvement and the actual mechanism. Thus my thesis is not intended to be an army review, but a complex picture of conditions of the era, the human relationships in the era, and the operation of the institutions according to the resources found and was possible to find. Still, all this speaks about the nature of the contemporaneous power relations primarily, accordingly about the new elite and the nomenclature world.

The resources of the research, its process, and its method

For my thesis, I relied on the documents that can be found in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Archives of the Information Centre. They keep the documents of the Educational Committee and the Hungarian Scientific Council there. The reconstruction of the establishment of the

Educational Committee and the structure, the changes in the list of members, legal background of the Hungarian Scientific Council is possible from these documents. Besides we get the opportunity to look into the appointments and the often contradictory and complicated exchange of letters. And of the changes that happened in the scientific life between 1948 and 1956.

During the research, I did a qualitative historical evaluation, after tracing the resources I tried to partly descriptively, partly interpretatively analyze them. The found resources – however tempting it is for the researcher – did not make it possible to write a fully linear and story without information gaps. Thus I could only try to unfold parts of the contemporaneous reality, but such details that would help to understand the ongoing processes of the era, unfortunately, I couldn't. The exploratory nature of this dissertation results in the fragmentation of the topics in this thesis booklet.

In this case evaluation of the resources didn't apply to the validity of the data found the resources but that the known or unknown authors worked for what underlying (hidden) motivations or pressure. In this sense, I endeavored to understand reality, not on the description. Taking into consideration the important point of view that all the time can appear any new resource that can give a different light to an approach thought to be relevant until that point.

Applying statistical methods (in detail *Nagy, 2012a*) can bring further achievements in the future. Unfortunately in the current phase of my research, I couldn't do any of these. Unequivocal that a direction of the further development of the present text can be a prosopographic investigation with the life path analysis of the members of the Educational Committee we can also discover a kind of recruitment direction.

The chosen research era, as a historical problem

The topic I've chosen is very sensitive. therefore controversial. The previously slow, at least less turbulent, trends in changes so far of 1948 (some historians call it "organic Hungarian development" (vö. *Rainer*, 2011. 65. o.) and this appeared also at the people as "Magyar út" (vö. *Papp*, 2012. 143. o.) breaking they have created comprehensive and at the same time radical changes. Units, bastions that previously thought to be solid, and indestructible crashed down, institutions have been reorganized thus the Academy transformed. In addition, large society-forming institutions lost their power (churches). At the same time, persons have excluded the main steam who prior was relevant persons of public life (such as Gyula Illyés or László Németh) or of scientific life (as Lajos Probánszka and Gyula Kornis).

Many people perceiving the changes drawn into the background and used the tactic the later called antalli "kibekkelés" (detailed: *Rainer*, 2008. 198. o.). In the political transition of 1990 many people discovered the continuance of the organic development that was diverted in 1948. (this was also enhanced by Antall József himself), sometimes anachronistically (vö. *Rainer*, 2008. 254–257. o.).

The judgment of the change of regime in 1948 and the consolidation of the Kádár regime – as the liberation from the Soviets in Hungary in 1945 or their invasion – became a political debate (a type of theological debate) in the public life's publicisms. The harm experienced by the elderly against the distancing and being indifferent from the researchers who belong to the new generation made understanding and evaluating the past even harder.

Change of the upper class in the science of education – retirements

For the reorganization of the domestic scientific life, they have created a new organization, whose name became the Hungarian Scientific Council (MTT). Its most important task was to eliminate the old scientists from the academy – from scientific public life – and their replacement in the universities. The MTT created a list of the scientists said to be fascist and on the list, containing 28 names appeared the name of László Ravasz bishop of the reformed church. Beside the historian Elemér Mályusz appeared the name of Lajos Prohászka, who was written to be excessively idealist, his pedagogy can't be valued and theoretically false for potential teachers. If we study the work of Lajos Prohászka we will find that his educational and his (cultural)philosophical works are subject to debate during his era, and also among his peers. His work on national characterology – *A Vándor és a bujdosó* – even as regards its genre can be contested as a national characterologicistic work. Among others the volume with the title *Mi a Magyar?* edited by Gyula Szekfű in 1939 was partly an answer to the thesis and issues brought up by Prohászka. In 1924 he got to know Eduard Spranger, who became his lifelong friend and he wrote his pedagogy on the basis of cultural philosophy under his influence (*Prohászka*, 1929). In his volume with the title “*Mai élet erkölcsé*” which was published in 1944 he has given a criticism of the socialism historical points of view, which he enhanced with negotiating this under the heading “*Irracionális hullámok*”.

I've found four opinions about Lajos Prohászka during my research. According to Béla Fogarasi, ha had a deliberately antidemocratic pinion and he was individualistic and autocratic, committed to the reactionary German

individualism. According to Fogarasi, he wasn't capable of educating others moreover, Prohászka was downright dangerous. According to József Waldapfel, he was a great supporter of monastic schools. During nationalization, he even collected signatures trying to prove they are the best. György Alexits considered applying him during the training of potential teachers harmful, without particular reasoning. György Lázár nominated Ferenc Mérei as the head of the Department of Pedagogy of ELTE because he presumed that Prohászka was loyal to the fascists and believed in apocalyptic pedagogy.

Neither Pál Bognár Cecil could stay teaching. Two persons had an opinion about the psychology teacher of the University of Szeged: According to József Waldapfel he wasn't valuable for the science and he was a monk whose perceptions were lagging behind. The other critic was György Lázár, who summed up by saying being a monk he is inadequate for doing research based on the present requirements of psychological researches.

These two examples specifically illustrate what the year of the turnaround meant for the internal world of the universities and also those personally who took part in crushing the carrier of others.

The main activities of the Pedagogical Commission of the MTA during the Rákosi era

In the focus of my thesis is the Pedagogical Commission operating in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. I chose this organization because the goal of the centralization of the 50s was to hold together and organize the science of education,

and the grouping in the new frames. The people taking part in this not only had an impact on their tighter university department but essentially they have put into word the countries' problems of the science of education, as a science and given answers to them.

It would be difficult to answer that question that precisely when was the Pedagogical Commission founded, either in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences or during the time Hungarian Scientific Council. The reason for this is that the dossier is not properly organized and although there are several documents in the dossier in many cases these were included in the file ad hoc – more like in chronological order. But despite these uncertainties, I am on the opinion that it is possible to reconstruct a type of beginning, more precisely *the role of the commission*: the organization and reorganization of the science of education. The documents additionally suggest that the head of the Pedagogical Commission first was Imre Trencsényi-Waldapfel. This is an important factor also because it sheds a light on the characteristic of the '50s: on the fluctuation, in which the political affiliation was exclusively important, not the professional achievements. Obviously, my analysis and interpretation are limited because apparently there is no decisive evidence – as there isn't for many things in the science of education – but in my opinion, there is a lot of evidence that proves that the Pedagogical Commission and its leader not only managed the commission but he led the complete field at least had a great influence on it.

The documents of the Pedagogical Commission – sometimes denominated as Main Committee - are starting with the box number 199. In the first box, 2 types of documents can be found: in the first few folder, there are some institutional documents (thus the reports of the National Institute of Education, Pedagogical Science Institution (only

plans then), Stata Institute of Psychology, and the Pedagogical Library (only drafts then)) in the further dossiers there are letters and official requests. The fact that the institutions sent their reports to the Commission can mean (I firmly believe that they do) that the Commission is a formally accepted authority by those who sent their reports as a center of the scientific management or as a top organization.

The new training of scientist in the pedagogy

The new training of the scientists appeared and have been introduced also in pedagogy. One of the results of this was that the candidate minimum has been introduced. They also ensured a possibility for those who applied for the “aspiratúra” (further training in socialist countries) training could gain the candidate title in the Soviet Union, Moscow. First, we take a look at those “aspiráns” candidates who got to the Soviet Union voluntarily or were in the delegation for “aspiratúra”.

It was possible to attend an “aspiratúra” in Hungary or in the Soviet Union, Moscow. They recruited students for each of the 2 “aspiráns” training by making contact with the head of the higher education institutions (deans and rectors), they advertised in the press, and they contacted ministries and factories for having enough candidates for the training. According to the remaining documents the recruitment was successful, resulting in 182 candidates who applied within the deadline and 961 candidates applying beyond the deadline.

There were 3 people in the Soviet Union from Hungary, for doing “aspiráns” training from pedagogy: Károly Komár, József Szarka and Lajos Duró. In the same year, a camp was organized for those scientist candidates, who were going to

accomplish the “aspirantúra” in the Soviet Union. The camp was necessary because for helping the integration of the outgoing.

The work of the “aspiráns”-es who were residing in the Soviet Union was characterized by serious deficiencies according to the documents I have found. It is unraveled too, that human behavior, professional and political development were controlled. Fundamentally this was done by the Scholarship Committee of the given city, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided help for this through the Hungarian Embassy in Moscow. While doing my research I found that the outgoing candidates got a family allowance, so they could travel without a financial problem and they can complete their work undisturbed.

In connection with the Hungarian “aspiratúra” many statistical documents remained. These are largely demonstrating that most of Hungary’s “aspiráns”-es were employed by ELTE. Dominant supervisors were, that is to say they had more than one “aspiráns” we can find György Ágoston, Béla Tettamanti és Endréné Székely; Gusztáv Bárczi and later József Szarka joined them with one candidate. From these professors also Endréné Székely and József Szarka studied in the Soviet Union, the latter professor did his „aspirantúra” there.

The characteristic of the political relationships of the era was that among the basic data we can find the origin of the candidate. Interesting that in the case of an “aspirantúra” with normal duration it is possible to access the supervisors' name and the topic too on the contrary if it was a shortened period this data can't be found.

The question arises that from the “aspiráns”-es who were those who successfully acquired the scientific degree. The answer to this question can be found in the online catalogue

of the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Science. Because they catalogued the doctoral dissertations and of the candidates of the MTA and all bibliographic data was available from the period after 1953. If we accept the database of the MTA as authentic we can say that from the "aspirans"-es with a normal duration only two: István Gordos and Sándor Köteles defended their candidate dissertation. Four person of who participated in the shortened course: Mátyás Bajkó, László Báti, Mátyás Durkó és László Buzás.

One headlined textbook discussion in the Pedagogical Commission, in 1952

During the 1950s several textbook discussions took place in the Pedagogical Commission because of the appearance of the Marxist approach and the appropriate representation of the current canon was a political key issue in textbooks.

Due to the topic of my work, the textbook discussions seem very important events, because they point out a type in the change of the elite. Besides the replacements and appointments – as obvious and radical political personal decisions – inner debates and the judgment of the work of various persons and the through this making impossible the working as an author, in my opinion, might have belonged among the less spectacular and less obvious methods. In other interpretation: the actual movement of persons happened between 1948 and 1950, at the same time the writing of the new textbooks can be interpreted as a symbolic level of the change of the elite. With the appearance of the new period, there was a need not only for new people but for a new approach and in the meantime textbooks with the new approach. From the documentation, it is possible to assume

that while in the Soviet version the occasions became the place for practicing public criticism and self-criticism, in Hungary happened in a modest form also because of the smaller size, although regarding their final results there couldn't be big differences.

Precisely that textbook discussion of Béla Tettamanti remained in the documentation of the period who returning from retirement got a possibility to form the science of education actively. In the debate despite the objections of the content, I consider important the question of the tone and 'tact' because in the atmosphere of nullifying the 'reactional' world of the past we can see more patterns of the change of the elite. In this sense, the situation of Béla Tettamanti was liminal so his story is especially interesting. 'Reactional' because he had reactional teachers, this can be sensed in his articles, but at the same time he tried to meet the new expectations but staying alive was a serious fight for him.

Béla Tettamanti wrote his book about the science of education in 1950-51 but the fundamental discussion about the book only happened in 1952. Assumably because one of the first experiments was the author tuned in the history of pedagogy on the basis of Marxism. There didn't exist extensive arguments for real critiques. On the other hand, Tettamanti deplored the lagging behind, the delays, and the superficiality of judgments. In the discussion happened in 1952 in addition to the assistants – György Lázár and Magda Dénes according to the documentation – several people participated from the academic sphere of the science of education.

The 32 years old György Ágoston of the newer generation began the judgment of the work of the author who was 67 years old in 1952 with a polite gesture and emphasizing its relevance which we can sum up in him being born before

Medinszkij could have written his own book. Because the situation has changed radically for 1952: “Our 3 years development and getting to know the Soviet works about the history of education properly the notes of Comrade Tettamanti leaves room for improvement. All this leaves us to assume that the Pedagogical Commission was characterized by a generational division too. Although Ágoston knew that the volume published before the Soviet Medinszkij cannot be underrated, the edge of the criticism leads to the consumption that despite Tettamanti changed his approach actually he cannot measure up to the newest expectations. Knowing this Ágoston symbolically backed out of the potential circle of the future builders.

The paper’s historical interest is that in 1950 the Study Department of University of Szeged published as a note, from 1956 remained a manuscript containing the ancient chapters of the universal history of duration and yet it could not become a book approved by the Pedagogical Commission of the Academy. That it could not is a good example of the dynamicity of the ideological and science policy of the ‘50s.

Summary of the transformation of the science of education

It would be difficult to prepare an assessment for the period between 1948 and 1960. I consider that in the current situation perfectly adequate the seen for here, seen from there standpoint from political scientists point of view. If we take into consideration the losses of the domestic history of education – theory and practice – and the science of education and almost at the same time it had to adapt to a new kind of situation and the fracture this caused to particular persons then we have to take in consideration that

here and there serious existences cracked, liquidation of existing traditions happened, sometimes only emphasis shifted or viewpoints changed. Lajos Prohászka and Sándor Karácsony can be an example for the cracking of existence earned from the science of education but it would be interesting to research those too who eventually left the science of education and pushed his fortune in a completely different field (such as Mihály György Vajda). The pluralism of the previous years and sometimes its debates narrowed and new frameworks came into existence (Soviet orientation instead of German orientation) within which there were topics considered to be “forbidden areas” because it would have inquired into the framework of the theory of education. This brought along that the researches were controlled according to the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The same was typical for the Humanities, thus for the philosophy, esthetics, and also for literary studies. This framework started to loosen in the 1980s years and it was possible to start the research of the ‘50s.

If we are viewing the situation from the point of view of the “socialist pedagogy”, even if establishing the new socialist pedagogy was not too successful but was effective for a short period of time. I would not call it successful because it was not capable of ‘producing’ new academics (saying it with other words: integrating into the temple of science) and – in the meantime – it was not able to create such public esteem as other fields of science managed. However, it could not exercise serious influence even towards the practical teachers and the officials of the ministry (essentially the theory stayed and stayed in the role of a maidservant). It was effective in the sense that it was able to break the western orientation – mostly we can talk about German orientation – of the science of education and turn to the east – this meant the Soviet

Union. It is necessary to remark here that it happened because of outside and political pressure above all, not as a result of the authors/translators obtaining information ‘voluntary’, ‘period of reflection’. Furthermore, it was able to make difference between the science of education and the previous “holy trio”: 1. history of education, 2. theory of education, 3. didactic, to complement and to further subdivide. Which became beneficial primarily for the sociology of education and youth research.

On the border zone of pedagogy

In my thesis, there have been mentioned matters that are not necessarily directly related to the science of education, or rather from a different point of view: they widen the horizon of the science of education. A question like this is the connection with psychology in the ‘50s. This is important also because for psychology the sometimes inextricably tight connection was fundamental. Because the Rákosi regime (and later also the Kádár regime) acted with discretion towards psychology. They considered the human image that was created by psychology the rival of the one created by socialism. We cannot ignore the fact that basically psychology believes in a slow change in human behavior (substantiation for this are psychotherapies) instead socialism promoted fast and revolutionary transformations. They strongly restricted the operation of psychology because of this, they especially supported the reflexology researches mentioning Pavlovi. Those who were interested in psychology must have involved the instructions of Pavlovi in his work.

According to the documents it seems like pedagogy has not defeated psychology at all, on the contrary: those dealing with psychology were being obliged to - at least for a while - find a

place for themselves in pedagogy. And when it was possible to deal with psychology again, they backed out. Those involved in the history of psychology consider the '50s as the years of repression and prohibition, but in reality, the picture is more nuanced. Institution of psychology could operate on the Faculty of Arts and the Pavlov Committee was established in the MTA, after 1956 the Psychological Committee. Members were doctors in the Committee mentioned first, and among them, scientists who were engaged in psychology without a medical degree couldn't fit (such as Dezső Várkonyi Hildebrand). Professionals with a strong linkage to psychology could be successful. It is also important to mention the Special Education Subcommittee which worked as the Psychological Committee and the Pedagogical Committee subcommittee. This meant the acceptance and admission of Special Education on the behalf of the Academy, in other words, we can talk about the institutionalization of a field of knowledge. This happened in 1957, approximately 150 years after the first specialized training courses for special education teachers and more than 50 years after the special education teacher training began in Vác. (Gordosné, 2010).

As for specific individuals in the '50s persons gained a candidate degree from the science of education who later moved away from the science of education. There are two known academics who started with this field: social psychologist Ferenc Pataki and sociologist Tibor Huszár. But we can't forget literary historian Mihály György Varga – who as the apprentice of Lajos Prohászka – first was engaged with educational science. Most importantly what distinguishes him from Pataki and Huszár is that they have chosen educational science from a sort of need and Vajda studied pedagogy on Prohászka's side. And as such in 1949

as the fifth piece of the Pedagogical notes he compiled notes from his academic lectures with the title History of education I (Vajda, 1949). Why Vajda moved away from educational science and why he became a literary historian we can only have assumptions. Presumably how his master, Prohászka got excluded from the scientific field, and practically he was ignored from the science of education until his death.

Further research possibilities

In my thesis, I have tried to use the focus points taken out as an example to demonstrate the transforming of education sciences, their representatives.

There are further research possibilities that are hidden in the topic. As an example: the research of the members of the Pedagogical Scientific Commission of the MTA from the '50s until the change of regime. With the help of prosopographic research would be possible to examine the group-related features of the members, followed by case studies of the phenomena behind outstanding achievements (age averages at each career position and the cases of those who are significantly younger and older; scientific 'average performance' and outstanding literature activity).

Students who have applied for aspirant training, textbook and curriculum authors, and educators working in teacher training can be included in this study in the future.

The appearance of the education sciences major in the 1950s assured possibility for the organization of the professional further training. The question of establishing and launching programmes, the change of the thematics, and the study of the textbooks may serve as a further complement in connection with the educational science in the era.

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