

Professionalism vs. Ideologization in the Hungarian Candidate Dissertations in Educational Science in the 1970s¹



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Abstract After World War II, the Soviet model was introduced in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, including Hungary, not only in the political, economic, and social spheres, but also in the field of science, and within it, in the system of qualification. The system introduced – which remained in place until 1993 – was aimed at creating a new intellectual class, so candidates had to meet political as well as professional requirements. In a pilot study on the process of knowledge construction in the next generation of scientists, we analyzed reviewers' opinions on doctoral dissertations in the 1970s. The theoretical framework was provided by Stichweh and Becker's notion of discipline and Bourdieu's field theory on the functioning of scientific disciplines. Qualitative content analysis was used to process 20 reviews. Although the candidates had to meet both professional and political criteria, the referees put more emphasis on professionalism. The analyzed reviewers' opinions of the show, that those within the scientific field already had more flexibility than those wishing to enter it, but that this meant only relative research freedom.

Keywords next generation of scientists, system of qualification, opinion of the reviewers, doctoral dissertation, education science

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Introduction

Our research on the development of Hungarian educational science can be linked to the approach that emerged in the 1970s, which paid attention to both the historical and sociological aspects of scientific development. Our research group investigates the disciplinary development and scientific communication of Hungarian educational science between 1970 and 2017, focusing on four key issues based on the four social components of disciplinary development: What were the characteristics of 1) the institutional infrastructure of Hungarian educational science in the period under examination; 2) the cognitive and social characteristics of its professional-scientific communication and 3) the cognitive and social characteristics of the scientific works produced by the scientific community; 4) the typical features of the provision of scientific supply? (Németh, 2018). Our research sub-group deals with the latter part, i.e. the issue of scientific education, the acquisition of scientific degrees and entry into the science community. The overviewed 1970s part of our study presented here, is linked to the research direction in the history of science that has emerged in the field of education in recent decades, which analyses the development of science under totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, and as part of this, explores the ‘Sovietisation’ of science in the former socialist countries, the pedagogical world of the communist-socialist dictatorships. In this context, a number of German educational historians have studied the development of pedagogy in the former GDR (Cloer & Wernstedt, 1994; Krüger & Marotzki, 1994; Gießler & Wiegmann, 1996; Cloer, 1998; Häder & Tenorth, 1997; Lost, 2000). In recent years, Hungarian researchers have also turned more and more intensively towards the study of the pedagogical phenomena of “existing socialism” (Garai, Németh & Szabó, 2016; Golnhofer, 2004; Golnhofer & Szabolcs, 2015; Szabolcs, 2006; Kéri, 2006; Nagy P. T., 2006; Németh & Biró, 2009; Németh, Biró & Garai, 2015; Pukánszky, 2004; Sáska, 2018). Important research on the countries of the Soviet bloc as a whole (Gawlicz & Staronawsky, 2018) and individually can be found, for example Znepolski,

2020 (Bulgaria), Häder & Wiegmann, 2004 (Czechoslovakia), Cichosz, 2020 (Poland), Fortescue, 1986 (USSR).

Theoretical Framework

As in the case of studies of the history of science analysing the development of education from a social history perspective, the developmental processes of education in the university setting are interpreted using the concept of discipline introduced in the sociology of science works of Becher (1989) and Stichweh (1992). In addition, we draw on Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu, 2005) on the functioning of scientific disciplines. According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 173), an important function of any disciplinary field is the continuous transmission of the scientific knowledge produced by the scientific community to the next generation of scientists, the training and professional socialisation of its own specialist offspring. A necessary precondition for the functioning of the disciplinary field is the creation of a legitimate system of criteria for the education of scientific offspring, a professional socialisation and career structure for the selection of scientific offspring, their professional ideological and ethical preparation, and professional indoctrination, which strictly mediates the specific rules of the given disciplinary field. An important feature of this structure, which also indicates the degree of autonomy of a given discipline, is the selection of scientific offspring from within the discipline's own corpus. In this way, a discipline defines its own, albeit constantly changing, boundaries and autonomously defines and regulates its selection and control processes to ensure its scientific quality.

Research Question

Within our topic, we were looking for answers to the following question: How were the scientific and political aspects of the evaluation of the new generation of scientists balanced in the opinions of the reviewers?

Methods

Due to the nature of our research, we used qualitative methods. To assess the professional performances of nominees, we analysed the reviewers' judgements. We processed the corpus by data mining and content analysis, for which we created a dictionary both inductively and deductively. The Atlas.ti text analysis software was used for analysis and interpretation. As a first step, we conducted a pilot study, which included in its test corpus a) reviewers' opinions (20) and b) candidates' thesis booklets (40). Content analysis was used to analyse the appearance of professional and ideological aspects in the reviewers' critiques, and the text units on professional identity in the thesis booklets (the results on the latter will be presented in another paper).

Political and Institutional Framework for Training and Scientific Qualification

In Hungary, scientific certification began to be more specifically addressed in the 19th century. Universities were given the right to prepare and certify people for academic careers. They awarded doctoral degrees, subject to ministerial confirmation, and, after habilitation, private teaching titles. With Hungary becoming Soviet era, this structure changed significantly.

After the World War II, the countries of the Soviet bloc adopted the Soviet model, Stalin's totalitarianism, and not only did politics, society and the economy become Sovietised, but also science, including academic qualifications (Romsics, 2005). The right of interpretation of Marxism-Leninism was not within the competence of the Communist Party of any Eastern European country, but they could decide who was or was not a Marxist in their country according to the given pattern. By this logic, it is one and the same thing to be an anti-Marxist and an enemy of the system (Sáska, 2018). This approach has also influenced academic life.

In Hungary by Decree-Law No. 44 of 1950, the process of awarding degrees was removed from the competence of universities and taken over by the Scientific Qualification Board (hereinafter: SQB), established in 1951. The SQB was responsible for deciding on the awarding

of the degree of Candidate of Sciences (CSc), introduced on the Soviet model, and was responsible for the qualification of the whole academic life. It was also in charge of preparing the admission of aspirants, assisting and supervising their work, liaising with Hungarian aspirants studying abroad and foreign aspirants studying in Hungary, allocating the honorarium of consultants and reviewers, and, among other things, placing graduates.

Political pre-screening was part of the admission process to the postgraduate programme, and the monitoring of political identity was also evident in the training and in the assessment of the dissertation. Article 9 of Decree-Law No. 9 of 1970 on academic qualification declared that the degree could be refused in cases ‘where the subject of the doctoral thesis is not relevant, where its theses are contrary to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, or where it violates the rules of socialist morality’. The SQB has also had the power to withdraw the degree in similar cases in the past. The ideological and political aspects remained in the regulations until 1989. According to the reports of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), the Soviet system of scientific qualification in Hungary had changed a lot by the late Kádár period. Although the TMB had the exclusive right to award scientific degrees, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was actively involved in “the management of the education of the scientific posterity, the control and development of scientific classification” (Reszkető & Váradi, 2002, p. 43).

Reviewers’ Opinions

The condition for entry to the “academic field” meant not only professional competence, but also ideological preparedness. This was a tacit expectation for the judges, while the regulations listed a number of criteria for content and form. There were 79 successful doctoral theses on education in the 1970s. Dissertations completed at that time were also judged by two examiners by default. Our examination material for the decade in question comprises 159 reviewer opinions. From this corpus, 20 documents (12.5%) were analyzed in the framework of the pilot research. The selection was random. In the process of elaboration (scanning of the material), we had the input of the following reviewers’

opinions. Our research objective was to explore the presence of professional and ideological aspects in the opposition opinions.

Professionalism Aspects

Based on the pilot research, it can be said that the critiques – usually 10 typed pages in length – are characterised by a focus on professional aspects. The reviewers concentrate on the subject chosen by the candidates and its context, and sometimes analyse a question in detail. These analyses can also be positive: “In my opinion, the essay-test format has rightly become the starting point for measurement. This choice is to be commended, because nowadays measurement is mainly carried out in the form of multiple-choice tests or any other easily quantifiable form” (Balázs, 1978, p. 4). More frequently, there are negative comments pointing out shortcomings, either in terms of content or form. One reviewer makes a lengthy comment on the reliability of tests: “Take a student who scores 30 points [on a 60-point test]. A reliability of 0.95 in this case means that his performance must be somewhere between 26 and 34 points. That is, there is no difference between a 26 and a 34-point performance, it is due to chance, the error is $-/+4$ points. This is a rather large margin of error. [...] Such reliable multiple-choice achievement tests are inappropriate for assessment, but if this is only discovered after the fact, it is not advisable to use the survey data” (Nagy, 1977, pp. 10–13). An example of a formal deficiency is the lack of an introduction in the dissertation by László Buzás (Buzás, 1976, p. 2): “Contrary to common practice, there is no introduction in this dissertation [...] I think that it is not just a stereotypical admonition, but that it can serve an important function. It can be significant if only because the subject of a thesis can be approached from different angles, with different objectives. It gives the author a way to justify the emphasis he or she has put on it.” The purely professional approach is also reflected in the following question: “[...] did the Catholic colleges of education – the Piarists, the Paulines, the Franciscans, etc. – really play such a subordinate role at this time as the author suggests in his work?” (Földes, 1972, p. 2).

The positive comments mainly concern the choice of subject. In addition to the topicality and scientific importance of the subject, reviewers emphasize its social importance: “It [touches] on a topical and socially significant subject (both theoretically and practically)” (Nagy, 1977, p. 2). “The choice of subject is very timely, since we are on the threshold of school reform and curricular reforms, and in this work, *mutatis mutandis*, certain principles and trends identified by László Nagy can be used” (Komlósi, 1975, p. 1). “The author’s dissertation is an examination of a topic of great political and educational interest” (Kelemen, 1976, p. 1); “A topic of outstanding social and scientific importance” (Durkó, 1975, p. 1). A more serious critical comment also begins with praise of the choice of topic: “Despite the virtues of the choice of topic, the work seems overly broad” (Vág, 1977, p. 1). The choice of the topic is also – among other aspects – taken into account when summarising the opinions and proposing the candidate’s degree. “[...] in view of the importance, courage and appropriateness of the choice of topic [...] I recommend [...] that the candidate be awarded the degree of Candidate of Sciences” (Sántha, 1975, p. 8). The reviewers typically justify their recommendation for the award of the degree on compliance with the academic requirements: “[...] it can be concluded that Endre Ballér’s work meets the academic requirements and processes, analyses and critically evaluates the older and more recent literature on the subject. His findings and conclusions, based on his impressively rich and multifaceted knowledge of the history of education and of theoretical pedagogy, are well founded, clear and sufficiently differentiated, well documented. The structure of the work is clear, the style smooth and readable” (Köte, 1975, pp. 2–3).

The Researcher’s Image, Attitude and Values that Emerge from the Reviewers’ Opinions

We find criticisms that not only mention a personality trait but are more specific about the values of the researcher. “[...] he organised the study with exemplary care and professionalism and analysed and evaluated the results. The measurement itself met the requirements of representativeness in every respect” (Bernáth, 1978, p. 1). The candidate’s use of

mathematical-statistical methods deserves special mention: “He uses mathematical statistics to visualise the numerical results” (Petrik, 1981, p. 4). A particular emphasis is given to the use of several methods by a disciple: “[...] the position that the combined application of these methods is of principle importance and orienting practical research work, and that reliable results can be expected from the combined application of these methods” (Szarka, 1972, p. 3).

In addition to professionalism and preparedness, a critical approach is both praised and expected in the reviews. “[...] critically summarises the views on historical conceptualisation in schools” (Balázs, 1978, p. 3). The historical approach is also one of the researcher’s values: “The author applies the principle of historicity to a large extent” (Szántó, 1976, p. 2). Not only the historical approach, but also its nuance is praised in one of the candidates by his reviewer: “The author’s analytical virtue is also his effort to avoid schematics. He does not see history as a pure formula with a single plane, but also notices nuanced differences and side currents that run counter to the main tendencies” (Rácz, 1972, p. 2).

Candidates are required to have knowledge of two foreign languages, more specifically to pass an exam in Russian and a world language of their choice, where only one requires an intermediate degree, the other a basic degree is sufficient. Knowing this situation, it becomes clearer why the dissenter’s knowledge of foreign languages is highlighted. “[...] he has demonstrated his aptitude for scientific research, his thorough methodological skills and his knowledge of foreign languages” (Szántó, 1976, p. 5).

Social and scientific-technical changes are often mentioned together in the critiques as challenges that the subject of the dissertation has to meet. “[...] it is partly due to rapid social and scientific-technical changes, and partly to the steady increase in the efficiency of education and training, that the curriculum may inevitably become less valuable over time because new circumstances demand more” (Fábián, 1978, p. 5). Even more specific is the reference to social change in Ottó Mihály’s review: “In the socio-historical process of the entire construction of socialism, in connection with the unfolding and development of the scientific-technical revolution, new needs

and requirements are emerging, and long-standing “living” needs are becoming more powerful, which make it inevitable to re-examine and revise our ideas about the pedagogical program of the development of the personality, and especially the actual process of its implementation and education” (Mihály, 1975, p. 1). We should sense in this suggestion that the critic is calling attention to personal development in a society that emphasizes commonality, focusing on the individual. It is not impossible that this is the reason for the strong premise: “[in] the socio-historical process of the entire construction of socialism”, and because no one knows exactly how this is achieved, he is including his own pedagogical vision, in which the development of personality, the development of an individual image, is given a prominent role. Another opinion also points to the role of the individual, to the problem of individual goals and their disregard. Among the “social reasons for the need for permanent education and adult upbringing”, the reviewer fails to explain “the importance of the correct use of leisure time – beyond the productive aspect, the individual” (Durkó, 1975, p. 2).

The Confrontation between Two World Orders

Despite the easing of tensions that began in 1953 – and the deepening dialogue of the 1970s – the Cold War confrontation and the international ideological struggle are still evident in the study of educational texts. Scientific achievements were strictly differentiated according to political affiliation: “[...] his studies and works are known and respected in several socialist and bourgeois countries” (Balázs, 1978, p. 1). The terms “bourgeois” and “Western” were used to distinguish the intellectual achievements of the capitalist world order. For example, “bourgeois pedagogy” (Mihály, 1975, p. 7); “many Western authors” (Nagy, 1977, p. 8); “criticising bourgeois views” (Sántha, 1975, p. 3). It is probable that this language demonstrates the persistence of an obligatory way of speaking rather than a real ideological commitment, but it can only be definitively asserted after processing the other candidate theses of the period under discussion.

In any case, the reviewers have found a way to point out the values of academia belonging to the other world order. László Kelemen,

for example, writes, as if only to complete the portrait sketched in the dissertation, that “Várkonyi then already had an excellent knowledge of and conveyed not only Dewey, but also the psychology and pedagogy of Claparède and Piaget. In contrast to the then prevailing German literature on pedagogy, he represented not only a fresh professional current, but also political openness and liberalism. The political and methodological liberalism that was still evident in the School of Action and the methodological principles of the bourgeois school in the years of fascism, and which is also described in this dissertation, flowed through these psychological channels. This does not mean, of course, that the psychological and pedagogical principles which were promulgated by this journal and its authors at the time are, even today, fully shared” (Kelemen, 1976, p. 8). In a clever turn of phrase, he concludes his reflection by putting his positive comments on “Western scholars” and the school of a bygone age in brackets, but without identifying exactly what the distancing refers to and to what extent. Mrs György Balázs (Balázs, 1978, p. 8), on the other hand, makes it clear that “[...] the author draws on the findings of the world-famous J. Piaget”.

We also find examples of how there was not a complete identity of views among those belonging to the same bloc within the socialist camp, since the countries had very different views on the common points of contact in history. One of the critics, while urging cooperation, refers to this: “[...] our Slovak and Romanian colleagues – despite certain differences of opinion, which undoubtedly still exist today – have uncovered and processed a great deal of material which we can use in our work as historians of education” (Földesi, 1972, p. 6). This reference reveals the differences between the socialist countries, which were still under the surface in the 1960s, were barely discussed in public in the 1970s, but were already emerging in the 1980s.

Ideological Aspects

The expectation of political-ideological commitment from the scientific offspring appears in countless twists and turns in the opinions of reviewers. In substance, it was a call to account for Marxism, for the assertion of a Marxist worldview and for the formulation of

a critique of bourgeois science. “The professionalism of the dissertation is matched by a sufficient ideological-political purposefulness, even if a more pronounced socio-political approach would have been necessary in places” (Fábián, 1978, p. 11). “[...] Marxist criticism cannot for a moment forget to criticize these [disorienting theories]” (Mihály, 1975, p. 7). “[...] a Marxist synthesis of the public education of an era and a region” (Orosz, 1977, p. 1). “It seeks to examine the problems from a Marxist position and perspective” (Kelemen, 1976, p. 4). “The in-depth thoroughness and fastidiousness with which the literature on the subject has been processed is commendable, and in presenting previous research, the work, research methods and results of the individual authors are analysed with a developed critical sense and a Marxist perspective” (Bíró, 1972, p. 3).

There was also criticism that attributed the candidate’s academic achievements explicitly to his political-ideological preparation. “The main source of the effectiveness of the research, the main guarantee of the use of the pedagogical arsenal itself, was the correct application of the theory and method of Marxism-Leninism: in the evaluation of theoretical source material and practical experience, as well as in the reasoned answers to the questions raised” (Sántha, 1975, p. 8).

The self-criticism of the candidates is praised. “[...] emphasising the author’s [...] realistic self-criticism, which is of great importance for scientific research” (Durkó, 1975, p. 1). This is how it is expressed elsewhere: “The constancy of self-control and self-revision in the results obtained is worthy of a scientific researcher” (Balázs, 1978, p. 5), It seems that self-control, self-evaluation, self-criticism on a social scale an important expectation, a component of the ideology emphasised by the party. It is no coincidence that the self-criticism development is one of the main aspirations of the socialist school. One of the critics of Báthory’s dissertation misses the emphasis on this. “No attention was paid to the very essential function of pedagogical evaluation, namely, that in socialist schools we try to educate for self-evaluation through evaluation (In this sense, all evaluation in our schools is formative-developmental!)” (Fábián, 1978, p. 5). This last quotation is also an example of how the predominance of the ideological aspect overrides

the professional aspect, in this case the distinction between the professional functions of evaluation becomes secondary.

Conclusions

We can conclude that reviewer opinions are essentially characterised by professionalism, even though we also found some critiques in which the ideological aspect overrode the professional. However, they cannot escape the socio-political-ideological influence of the times, if only because the central expectation of academic successors is that they are well-prepared in terms of worldview. In addition to professionalism, those in the academic world are still obliged to demand a Marxist-Leninist worldview from those wishing to enter. Despite this, in some of the criticisms, there is a perceptible tendency to de-emphasise the ideological aspect. In József Nagy's review, for example, there is only a vague reference to "what is said about the essence and functions of pedagogical evaluation conveys a comprehensible and acceptable approach" (Nagy, 1977, p. 2). At a time when the two world systems were at odds, the science was also divided, but despite this, Hungarian education scientists found a way to point out the scientific values of the Western world. The period was characterised by an ideology that prioritised community values, so it is particularly noteworthy that in two of the 20 reviews examined, the emphasis is on the individual, highlighting the importance of personal development and the individualisation of leisure time. This also indicates that those who were already part of the academic field had more scope to assert professionalism than those who were waiting to enter. At the same time, it can be said that only relative research freedom prevailed in educational work, as in other areas of the social sciences.

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