BOOK REVIEW

Langerné Buchwald, J. (2022). Alternativitás és pluralizmus a magyar közoktatásban és pedagógusképzésben a rendszerváltozástól napjainkig [Alternativity and pluralism in Hungarian public education and teacher training from the system change until today]. ELTE PPK.

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ALTERNATIVITY AND PLURALISM OF EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTS

Progressive education and alternative educational concepts in Hungary are an integral and at the same time decisive part of Judit Buchwald’s research interest. Her latest book Alternativitás és pluralizmus a magyar közoktatásban és pedagógusképzésben a rendszerváltozástól napjainkig published in Hungarian, describes different progressive educational concepts and projects in public education and in teacher training, can be seen as a summary of her research work in this area. She knows her topic not only from a theoretical perspective but also from a practical perspective as well: She worked as a director at the Széchenyi István Primary School and Kindergarten in Hegyfalu, which operated according to the Kincsesház alternative program. She also worked as a coordinator of the National Center for Value Transfer and Skill Development Program (Értékközvetítő és Képességfejlesztő Program Országos Központ).

The study of alternative educational concepts is not a new research field for the author either as she has already published several papers on this topic: In her Ph.D. thesis she examined the limits and possibilities of extending the reform-pedagogical school concepts in public education. She examined famous international and national concepts such as the Montessori and the Waldorf pedagogy, the Scuola di Barbiana, Alexander Neil’s Summerhill and the NYIK, and ÉKP concepts of József Zsolnai. She dealt with the questions, of whether are alternative schools elite schools, what Hungarian teachers know about alternative school programs and how was the Hungarian reception of international concepts.

The book Alternativitás és pluralizmus is a continuation of this research direction. It was published in the book series of the Institute for Education and Psychology of the Eötvös Loránd University, with forewords from Tamás Kozma and Attila H. Horváth, who both praise the research as a basic work “with encyclopaedical character”. It shows the most important

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developments in a historical context from the democratic regime change in the 1990s until today. The book is divided into five main chapters.

In the first chapter of the book, we can learn about the goals and methods of the study as well as about the researched organizations, institutions, and persons. As a main goal, the author wants to show the changes the interpretations of the term “alternativity” (Buchwald 2022, 19) and tries to create a criteria system to analyze “alternativity and pluralism” in Hungarian public education (ibida). For that she not only analyzed legal texts and policies as well as documents of and about alternative schools, including scientific literature, statistics, and databases but also used the method of “oral history”, interviewing experts from the field. The author attempted to clarify the semantic domain of “alternativity” or “alternative school” as a definition, which is essential for the discussion of the topic. She shows the state of research in Hungary, describing different definitions and categorizations in educational research.

The second chapter discusses the changes/developments in the interpretations of the term “alternativity” after the regime change in 1989/90 and its current situation in public education law and the Hungarian scientific literature. Readers get a good idea of the hitherto attempts to categorize alternative schools. After pointing out the difficulties of these attempts Buchwald presents, at the end of the chapter, her criteria for the analysis of the Hungarian situation.

The third chapter begins with a very interesting panorama of alternative educational institutions i.e., the Alternativ Közgazdasági Gimnázium, the Belvárosi Tanoda and the Kék Madár program, which were established in the 1980s and the 90s in Hungary. Then the author discusses the development of these alternative programs, asking the question about the changing definition(s) of “alternativity”. She answers this with the help of important educational conferences and different databases e.g. the Association of Foundation- and Private Schools (Alapítványi és Magániskolák Egyesülete). Buchwald also lists the most important organizations for the support of alternative schools and other educational institutions. The second part of this chapter is the most exciting part of the book. We learn about the changes in the legal regulations regarding their funding, and functioning and how these regulations affect the pedagogical work, teaching, and learning in these institutions. The author describes the various effects of these changing regulations with the term “in the flow” (“változások sodrában”) which shows the increasing difficulties of alternative education in Hungary, and also their – often individual – solutions to deal with them, analyzing the reasons for their termination as well. At the end of the chapter, she deals with a special and relatively new form of alternative education programs; the so-called learning communities (“tanulóközösségek”).

In the fourth chapter, Buchwald discusses the alternative educational programs in Hungarian teacher training, analyzing different concepts, such as the programs of József Zsolnai, the Waldorf Pedagogy, and the University of Miskolc. She shows their role and relevance in different historical periods and points out that there were and are important concepts in the further education of teachers as well, for example in Pilisborosjenő.

The conclusion of this very interesting and complex research study we can find in the fifth and final chapter: The author diagnoses a significant need in Hungarian society for alternativity and pluralism in education, which unfortunately not always found and find significant support from the official education policy. Nevertheless, Buchwald shows how determined the interviewed educational actors fight to continue the progressive education tradition in Hungary. Therefore, Judit Buchwald’s book Alternativitás és pluralizmus a magyar közoktatásban és
pedagógusképzésben a rendszerváltozástól napjainkig will be of interest to both professionals, and non-professionals. It can be purchased here: https://eltebook.hu/aternativitas-es-pluralizmus-a-magyar-kozoktatasban-es-pedagoguskepzesben-a-rendszervaltozastol-napjainkig.