

THE TREND OF EDUCATION IN INDEPENDENT LITHUANIA

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LITHUANIA is situated geographically approximately on the border between Eastern and Western Europe. In this fact some philosophers have tried to see a mission on Lithuania's part to unite those two spiritually different worlds and to help each of them recognize the other's values, thus performing the role of a cultural intermediary. However, as the West's scientific, philosophical and generally rational genius manifested itself with increasing strength, and as Eastern Europe was being seized by a destructive power that threatened the whole of Western civilization, the attention of the Lithuanians became fixed entirely on the West. Lithuania, having freed itself from the Russian Empire, went along with the West in every respect, and spiritually allied itself firmly with the community of Western European peoples.

The Lithuanian people understood that, since their country was comparatively small and was surrounded on three sides by powerful neighbors, it could survive only by intensively increasing its cultural progress and strengthening its national consciousness. Therefore, the Lithuanian educational system, too, was firmly established on the principle of creating a strong cultural community that would assimilate the whole of Western culture, join in its progress and make a valuable contribution to it with its own national values. The Lithuanian people saw cultural progress as taking place mostly in the West, where — besides the great civilized nations — there are a number of countries that, though they are no larger or not much larger than Lithuania, have still made a very great contribution to the totality of human civilization.

Lithuania also identified itself with the West in its educational tendencies. Most of its important professors and teachers were educated in Western European universities. Lithuania's pedagogical life was for the most part based on the latest pedagogical ideas of Western Europe, and its educational system was organized and reformed according to the dominant Western systems. In this way Lithuanian education joined the educational tradition of Western Europe and became a part of it.

Lithuanian education, being in accord as it was with pedagogical tendencies in Western Europe, developed along paths somewhat different from those followed by modern pedagogy in the United States.

As everywhere else in Western Europe, the dominant educational philosophy in Lithuania was the so-called traditional pedagogics, based on the great spiritual values. Living through an idealistic period of re-establishment of its independence,

and being a religiously minded nation of land tillers, Lithuania organized an idealistically oriented system of schools in which theoretical values were more highly regarded than practical values, spiritual values than material values, social values than individualistic values and absolute values than relative values. Such predominant general feelings and tendencies provided a foundation for the erection of a humanistic educational system that placed emphasis on the cultural aspects. The principal object of such a system was to introduce the adolescent to the human civilization that has evolved up to now and to develop his body and spirit with the help of humanistic values so that he might become a valuable member of the cultural community.

Among Western European educators the strongest influence on education in Lithuania was exercised by F. W. Foerster, the representative of moralistic pedagogics; G. Kerschensteiner, creator of the activity school and representative of idealistic pedagogical thought; and O. Willman, one of the creators of social pedagogics. Lithuanian schools, primarily under Foerster's influence, strongly emphasized the moral nature of educational work and the precedence of this moral

nature over individualistic tendencies. Kerschensteiner's influence was in the main felt, directly or indirectly, by those who admired the principle of schools based on activity and who related moral education not so much to religious education as to the principles of a moralistic world view. Willman had his greatest influence on those educators who were striving for a many-sided and integrated education. Under his influence, the principle of integrated education took very strong roots in Lithuania's theoretical pedagogics. Educators also felt keenly the influence of new educational trends and reform movements that manifested themselves in Western Europe and that encouraged interest in new pedagogical ideas and fresh pedagogical progress. In spite of all these influences, however, education in Lithuania, as generally in Western Europe, progressed with no marked alienation from traditional education. It was merely a matter of accepting the advantages accruing from new ideas and enriching educational progress in new ways.

Because of dominant influence of traditional pedagogics, the principle of concentrating on the child was not very well received in Lithuania, or in Western Europe in general, and it was not believed that the basic problems of integrated education could be solved by that principle. Traditional education acknowledges that the child's independent activity has great educational significance, and it places a high value on those manifestations in which the child, acting independently, comes to significant conclusions and forms his convictions from them. However, the predominant belief is that an education that depends solely on the independent activity of the individual cannot be either complete or integrated, since an education based on the child's interests will not introduce him to all spheres of culture or embrace all the aspects of education that make up an integrated educational system. The integrated process of upbringing depends not only on the student, who acquires knowledge and experience in the course of learning but also on those cultural values that he acquires and assimilates and that enrich his spiritual life, as well as on the educator who selects these cultural values for the student and introduces him to them in methodical fashion, helps him assimilate them and thus exercises a positive educational influence on him. This is why education in Lithuania was for the most part understood as planned activity on the part of the grownup for the sake of the adolescent, in order to help him mature in all respects and to grow into the cultural community. In the broader sense, education was understood as the sum total of all the influences, personal and impersonal, that educate a human being throughout his life. This is why the school system was expected not only to encourage the child's independent activity, not only to teach and educate him and exercise a positive educational influence on him, but also to try to recognize and control all the influences acting on the child outside the school.

Cultural aims, which direct education itself toward cultural values, are dominant in the traditional pedagogics of Western Europe. In spite of differences in school systems and in the types of schools of general education, upbringing work in all of them is primarily understood as a process of transmitting culture whose aim is to mature the human being through cultural values and to form in him an individually organized consciousness of values. The Lithuanian system of education, following the same trend in spite of its strong emphasis on the principle of integrated education, paid predominant attention to cultural education and the assimilation of cultural values, since it is possible to make cultural progress only if cultural achievements are transmitted to the young people and if their spiritual life is enriched with cultural values. In this way a person enriches his own thinking with the thoughts expressed and the conclusions reached by the great thinkers. He enriches his esthetic experience by becoming acquainted with the great works of art produced in the past and by learning to respond to them profoundly. He expands his knowledge with past experience. He makes his moral behavior rational by acquainting himself with the deliberations of many thinkers on moral norms and with the solutions to moral conflicts reached by many creative artists. He makes his social relationships more profound by recognizing the multiplicity of human problems in general that he finds in the creations of the literary genius of various peoples. By acquainting the adolescent with the basic cultural values and by transmitting their synthesis to him, not only does one introduce him to cultural life but at the same time he acquires a basis for admiring its values, for developing a positive attitude toward them and for resolving to work for their further realization. In other words, cultural education aims at making a person well acquainted with the evolution of Western culture, at introducing him to the humanities and the social and exact sciences, at directing his interests, efforts and energies toward spiritual values and at civilizing his social relationships, his emotional life and his whole behavior. By this means the riches created by spiritual genius become an instrument for the intellectual, esthetic, social, moral and religious growth of a young person.

Besides the cultural tasks of education, traditional Western European education has in recent times emphasized more and more strongly the educational process itself and the social tasks of education, which are as follows: 1) to instill social consciousness in general, through the use of education, and to eliminate an individual's socially harmful interests and increase and develop his socially useful talents and propensities; to train him to subordinate his interests to the common interests of the community in which he lives and to enhance his capacity to sacrifice himself for their sake; to subordinate his social instinct to cultural cooperation; to subordinate his propensity for searching for the meaning of things to the standards of a gentleman; to cultivate in him respect for man and to train him to respect the rights of others; 2) to implant in the student a social ethic; to subordinate human relationships to moral requirements; to subordinate the instinct of force to ethical norms; to cultivate responsibility based on consciousness; to implant in him adherence to social justice; 3) to cultivate empathy—an understanding of and sympathy with others.

The aims of social education are made concrete as the individual assimilates into his consciousness and understands his tasks in the basic social units—family, classroom, school, people and state.

General education in Lithuanian schools was based on a closed system, consisting of a limited number of study subjects. This shows that over-all education was already dominant there. Professional subjects made up only a small part of the

program. There were professional schools in widely varied fields and at several levels; in these schools professional preparation was dominant, and was supplemented by general-education subjects. This closed system, consisting of a limited number of subjects, was based in the main on the following three principles:

1. the subjects studied in the schools of general education were of the kind necessary for every civilized person, since they embraced the basic spheres of life and provided an understanding of culture and of the world;
2. the subjects offered in the general-school curriculums were also considered valuable for their educational significance; for instance, certain mathematical sciences were studied not so much for their applicability to life as for the multitude of problems they presented to mind, problems whose solution is of developmental significance;
3. a high level of knowledge and civilization can be maintained only by providing a closed system of subjects that are compulsory for everyone.

With its loss of freedom Lithuania also lost its schools. They are no longer in Lithuanian hands, and they are not managed according to the desires of the Lithuanian people. An alien educational system with alien aims has been imposed upon the Lithuanian schools. They have been transformed into an instrument for destroying the national consciousness in Lithuanian young people, and their purpose now is to educate fanatical fighters for Communism, fighters against the interests of their own people. Not a trace has been left of the cultural trend of education.

Nevertheless, the schools in Lithuania remain the most important arena of the people's struggle for survival. The young people who are attending these schools know what the occupier is striving for; they feel his alert eye following them, and the pressure he exerts on them to make them act against their own convictions, but they believe in a better future and they practice passive resistance. In this way a new generation is growing, a generation that lives by the spiritual heritage of the past and that has faith in a brighter, more just future.