

**Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation**

**The Reception of Assorted Interpretations on  
the Pedagogy of Johann Friedrich Herbart in  
Hungary**

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## **1. Antecedents and aims of the dissertation**

Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) is a prominent figure of the history of education and educational studies. The profession mentions him as a Prussian pedagogue, a (Kantian) philosopher and the creator of associationism, therefore a psychologist. His work has been published by the posterity in 19 volumes, and his followers publicized and developed it further by their own pursuits. Herbartian pedagogy or the pedagogic tradition, as it became known by the work of his adherers, Herbartianism, Herbartian paradigm, and Prussian pedagogy are widely known concepts and school practices today. In terms of impact it is the determinative approach of educational studies in Central and Eastern Europe, meanwhile we can highlight the application of his didactic results in other countries, and the teacher training based on Herbartian principles in Western Europe, the USA, and Japan (too).

Despite the above listed results his perception remained ambiguous, and his merits are dimmed by the distance of the past. This is evidenced by the fact that while in German and English there are hundreds of books

and thousands of articles on the subject, in Hungary (during the last 150 years) only a monograph and a few ten-page articles or book chapters have been published about some of his pedagogy's aspects, supplemented by references within short papers and textbook chapters.

The national professional community dealt with Herbartian principles less and less following its rejuvenation during the second half of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century they formulated critical comments against this pedagogy and what is more, they attacked, stigmatized and rejected it. The prosperity of new trends made Herbartian pedagogy an outdated system and a historical relic. The second wave of this rejection became significant after World War II. Socialist pedagogy's stigmatizing tone determines his pedagogy's interpretation to this day. During the 2001 National Conference on Educational Studies' Herbart-symposium, our country's leading research professors gave words to the need of re-examination. The talks of this symposium were published in 2002 on the pages of *Iskolakultúra*, but since then we can't read anything about Herbartianism on any professional forum.

The dissertation's objectives are as follows. 1. Create a new picture of Herbart relying on primary sources and „advanced” domestic and international literature. (Monographies of Ernő Fináczy and Magda Dénes. Studies of László Brezsnayánszky, György Mikonya, András Németh, Béla Pukánszky, Endre Kiss, Beatrix Vincze. Publications and received books of Internationale Herbart Gesellschaft.) 2. Describe significant interpretations of Herbart during the last 150 years, and classify them, if possible. (There exists only a few literatures on the subject, therefore our starting point includes textbooks and lecture notes used in teacher training, and the journal Magyar P(a)edagógia). 3. Apply lessons derived from the professional discourse in postmodern approach and reception theory on the topic of collective memory in relation to the Herbart-readings. (Application in this case is directed to the understanding of descriptions. The author tries to point out the interpretations' historical background, but does not undertake an outlined or detailed presentation.) 4. Furthermore, question the interpretation of reform and socialist pedagogy – two prominent groups among the

attackers of Herbart's pedagogy – by comparing them against Herbart's primary writings and their professional assessments formed during the last decades.

## **2. Methodology and different approaches**

### *The method of hermeneutics and the reception theory*

Beginning in the 1960s, the representatives of literary science and philosophy have been pursuing a lively debate about the possibilities of scientific understanding. Participants of this discourse questioned the objectivity of some explanations, and pointed out the limits of comprehension and interpretation.

According to scholars, such as Jauß, who prefer to promote the historical approach, reception is formed, here and now, in a peculiar historical point in time, in a particular social milieu. Contingent upon the foregoing, interpretation in the moment of reception is concurrently reinterpretation, the transubstantiation of information communicated. A scholar's credibility depends on how s/he is able to propagate and communicate his/her

premisses and preceding conclusions affiliated to the subject matter herein.

Sequels of the philosophical discourse are applied by scholars specialized in the history of education as well. In the course of this research, the method of hermeneutics is applied to identify sources that give rise only to surmises in lieu of upshots of individually conducted research. The former are not to be considered credible sources in the process of formation of a new interpretation on Herbart. Nevertheless, efforts are exerted to introduce sources that have been proven acceptable in knowledge of professional arguments/readings, are part of our preliminary knowledge, and designate our interpretation on Herbart.

Before we describe the different interpretations, we rely on primary or domestic and international literature, so we can demonstrate the resources which determine our view of Herbart and explain the classification of Herbart-readings produced in the past. Since there are so few literary sources on the subject, we relied on textbooks about the history of education – used

in teacher-training – and a periodical named Magyar P(a)edagógia.

*Exploring the sources*

Only one of Herbart's works was translated to Hungarian, and that is why we consider source exploration, i.e. the study of primary texts, important in order to establish an acceptable modern Herbart-reading. All of his works – writings and letters – are made available in German edited by Gustav Hartenstein, Karl Kehrbach, or Karl Kehrbach and Otto Flügel. In 1964, Walter Asmus published a selection from Herbart's prominent works and since then, numerous textbooks and interpretative writings about highlighted sections help our understanding. We can view every volume in electronic form in the Internationale Herbart Gesellschaft's archive, and some of them are also available as scanned documents on other platforms. Among the sources we rely primarily on his correspondence and the Allgemeine Pädagogik aus dem Zweck der Erziehung abgeleitet, one of his lesser known works in Hungary, but some of his statements and his

pedagogic system are presented by using quotations from his other works.

### *Secondary literature*

In the thesis we repeatedly refer to statements from secondary literatures. These are German, English and Hungarian papers, dissertations, books, book chapters and monographs. Part of the foreign language books are selected from works considered relevant by the Internationale Herbart Gesellschaft. It is important to mention that these are not only published after 2000. Members of this society quote from 20th century's secondary literatures several times. Naturally, beside international sources we refer to prominent domestic books, book chapters and papers, too.

Literature compiled in the German language incorporate books of the members of the *Internationale Herbart Gesellschaft* published in the 21<sup>st</sup> century concerning the subject matter herein, such as the works of Klaus Prange, Elmar Anhalt, Rotraud Coriand, the reflections of researchers engaged in reform pedagogy, such as of Herman Nohl, Hermann Röhrs, Jürgen Oelkers, Dietrich Benner, Herwart Kemper, Winfrid



Böhm, Ehrenhard Skiera, Wolfgang Scheibe, and further relevant publications, such as the compositions of Lothar Klinberg, Gerhard Müßener, Emil Müller, Peter Metz, Anreas Hoeschen, Lothar Schneider, printed in the past fifteen years concerning the subject matter herein. In addition to the researchers listed above, Oleg Zayakin's piece concerning the adaptation of the Herbartian principles in Russia is remarkable; Zayakin's deductions represent a base line for the review of the Soviet socialist interpretation of Herbartian pedagogy. In addition to oeuvres listed above, this doctoral dissertation refers to monographs and publications that the Internationale Herbart Gesellschaft lists as relevant literature written in German and published in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the monographs of Walter Asmus, Dietrich Benner, Joseph Leonhard Blaß, Christain Caselmann, Erich Geißler, Josef Kühne.

Anglo-Saxon literature gives supplement to the end results of German literature. Compiled by Harish Bansal in the English language, the résumé of the history of teacher education verifies the assumption that the Herbartian practices of teacher education can be

identified in Anglo-Saxon regions as well. Johannes Bellmann's study gives account of how Herbart was received, while that of Dewey reports a recognizing attitude toward Herbart. Allan Blyth calls attention to the discrepancies of the Herbartian system, whilst Henry Macdonald Knox repeats the standpoint of German researchers claiming that Herbart's books published after 1806 can be understood as further explanation of his first imperative creation titled *Allgemeine Pädagogik aus dem Zweck der Erziehung abgeleitet* (1806).

### *Textbooks*

First we undertook the examination of textbooks stored in the National Pedagogical Library & Museum and the National Széchenyi Library. (These were textbooks about the history of education and lecture notes, all of them used in teacher training.) After the examination of their contents we grouped them according to interpretational differences, which process and its results will be described in the fourth chapter of this dissertation. Thanks to this, the thesis emphasizes less the explored contents, but more the impact of the books (and other sources) and the differences between their interpretations.

The differences will be illustrated by using 27 textbooks. (Descriptions of Áron Kiss 1872; Ágost Lubrich 1876; János Erdődi 1900/1907; László Molnár 1900; József Baló 1905; Miklós Kórody 1915; Oscar Browning 1907; Antal Tóth 1929; Ernő Fináczy 1934; Oszkár Molnár 1943; Imre Németh 1945; Gyula Sebes 1945; László Vincze 1949/ 1950; László Faragó – Árpád Kiss 1949; Ferenc Niklai 1951; Medinszkij, Jevgenyij Nyikolajevics; Antal Tanay 1954; Konsztantinov – Medinszkij – Sabaeva 1959; Magda Dénes 1967; Sándor Komlósi 1981; Mátyás Bajkó – László Vaskó 1985; Sándor Bereczki 1988; Gábor Tóth 1990; Dezső Boros 1987/1993; Erzsébet Fehér 1991; Tibor Lázár 1992; Béla Pukánszky 1992). Selection wasn't made with the goal of statistical analysis in mind; rather we wish to focus on bringing the interpretational trends to light and following changes in the professional discourse.

### *Herbart references in Magyar P(a)edagógia*

Magyar Pedagógia is the first periodical dedicated to the experts of educational studies. Its predecessor, the journal Magyar P(a)edagógia was founded in 1892 by the Hungarian Pedagogical Society. Until 1947 the periodical

published its writings uninterrupted. In 1949, it continued the publishing work under a new name with an appropriate grammatical change – Magyar Pedagógia – but in 1951 ceased its operations again for political reasons. In 1961, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences restarted the journal under the auspices of its Educational Committee. Due to its long history, continuous operation and significance, our survey of this journal corresponds with our main goals. Herbart references can be verified with the help of the journal’s repertoriums. These publish only Herbart-themed papers, thus we can give place to the appearances of Herbart citations during our exploration, too.

### **3. Structure of the dissertation**

The dissertation contains seven large (indicated by Roman numerals) segments, which can be further divided into chapters and subsections.

In the first part we describe the relevance of our topic. After this we present the thesis’ theoretical background, the problematics of denominating concepts

associated with Herbartian pedagogy, and the study's objectives, methodology and hypotheses. In the third part, our own interpretation of Herbart appears as prior knowledge related to the topic, which precedes the creating of further planes of interpretations. Thereby we fulfill one of our main goals: we ascertain – with the help of relevant primary sources and secondary literatures – a view of Herbart which is both acceptable for us and supported by professional arguments. After this, we turn to our next commitment. One of our hypotheses is that we can structure the readings gleaned from textbooks, journals and books. In the third part of the dissertation we differentiate between the following planes of interpretations from the Composition of 1867 to 2001: 1. We start with the controversial reception of Herbartian pedagogy in the second half of the 19th century. 2. After this, Herbart appeared as a reformer of psychology and ethics, and the developer of scientific pedagogy. 3. This recognition was followed by – in the light of new psychological discoveries – an intent focus on the critical points of Herbartian psychology and ethics. 4. This focus turned into an outright attack, thus in the first decades of

the 20th century, Herbartian pedagogy became an outdated system next to the new trends of reform pedagogy. 5. The advocates of community education thought of it as individualist. 6. After World War II, several textbook authors branded him a bourgeois pedagogue. 7. We found readings where though he didn't appear reactionary, he was described as a cruel educator/thinker. 8. Because of this, Herbart became known as an authoritarian, reactionary pedagogue. 9. After his monograph was published, a more professional and objective reading came to light. 10. But this didn't become widespread, because in later descriptions we can see attributives showing up again from the previous decades. 11. Naturally, there were authors who separated themselves from this latest group by searching for new discoveries in the Herbartian pedagogy. At the beginning of the 21st century, we are witnessing a similar pursuit, since the profession is looking for new interpretations. The fifth part of this dissertation offers thoughts on the opposition of reform and Herbartian pedagogy and – much the same way – in the sixth segment, we analyze the unique connection between socialist and Herbartian

pedagogy by questioning the former's statements. The seventh part summarizes our study's results and tries to establish further conclusions.

#### **4. New scientific results of the dissertation**

Eleven interpretations, as disseminated in this dissertation, can be understood and will become significant in view of the following correlations:

1. The contradictory reception depicted in the textbooks fundamentally demonstrates the confrontation of professional standpoints and convictions that disagree with each other. Ideas that had emerged at the outset of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were still of dominating nature in the second half of the same century. (See, for instance, Milde's theory of Catholic education.) In consequence of the educational reforms (primarily) in Austria in the 1870s, and of the launch of the so-called *Organisationsentwurf*, and of Mór Kármán's pioneering performance, Herbart's pedagogy became increasingly known and a subject of research within scholarly circles. The argument between Lubrich and Kármán reflects the

confrontation of “old” and “new”, the reinforcement of state control, the restructuralization of values, and a great deal of tension that was typical to the initial decades of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This period bears significance in view of understanding Herbart in our age, because Herbart became part of the scientific discourse.

2. In the aftermath of Kármán’s efforts, Herbartian pedagogy became known in a wider circle. The principles of Herbart became essential not only in the course of reforms in secondary education but also of the structuralization of teacher education, nay, the theory of concentration by Herbart-Ziller appeared in the curriculum of compulsory public elementary education/schools. Scholars apprehended the excellence of Herbartian pedagogy. In textbooks published in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Herbart was introduced as a substantial mastermind of pedagogy. On account of the foregoing, Herbart today is considered to be a systematizing pedagogue, a paramount theorist of pedagogy, and furthermore the significance of moral education is underlined among his scientific merits.



3. As of the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *métier* [of education], in light of the most recent psychological research, has also pointed out the disputable aspects of Herbartian psychology and ethics. In addition to Herbart's merits, the discrepancies of his system and the vulnerability of his conclusions have been noticed. Grounded on the results of experimental psychology, the pedagogy of Herbart is considered to be intellectualistic and mechanic. It is criticized that Herbart makes children take only negligible number of actions and fails to pay appropriate attention to their physical education. Reform tendencies unveil the problematic base line of Herbartian pedagogy, namely that it fails to consider demand for the individual education of children and their particular psychological properties. Descriptions of our age do not lack the foregoing criticism either, and they assess the pedagogy of Herbart through such a viewpoint.

4. In addition to the explicit description of Herbartian pedagogy, primarily after Fináczy, focus on Herbart's excellence and critical reflections concerning him can be identified in the period between the two World Wars. The advantage of Fináczy's description is

that he returns to the primary sources and reviews the recognizing and critical observations recorded in the preceding decades. After Fináczy, researchers of the ensuing decades acted likewise: they assessed primary sources chronicling Herbart and took account of judgments on Herbart accomplished in the preceding decades.

5. In the 1940s, the representatives of community education found both the reform pedagogues and Herbart to be individualistic. The introduction of this reading desires to describe such an interpretation on Herbart that is already absent from the interpretation on Herbart these days subsequent to the political changes of 1989.

6. Similarly to individualistic teacher education, only few sources are available today in concern to the bourgeois interpretation on Herbart having been fashionable in the Soviet socialist period. Herbart as a servant to state interest seems to be a returning statement even today, but he, as a bourgeois or retrograde pedagogue, is not listed anywhere.

7. Published in 1951, Medynsky's writing about Herbart does not include the definition of "bourgeois".

Medynsky returns to the “objective” interpretation on Herbart, and he imparts both excellence and criticism, and by undoubtedly distorting the criticism of reform pedagogy he describes Herbart as a person that intentionally fails to pay attention to the psychological education of children. Medynsky shows a merciless Herbart. Today, contemporary Hungarian interpretations on Herbart mitigate Medynsky’s reading, and the character of a cruel pedagogue has been replaced by an authoritarian interpretation on Herbart.

8. A reading published at the end of the 1950s connects Medynsky’s strict interpretation on Herbart with the bourgeois interpretation. As in the case of other interpretations, Herbart is portrayed as an outstanding pedagogue, but his educational notion under no circumstance can be an example to follow. Such a condemning tone, which criticised not only Herbart but also other crucial pedagogical streams, came from the particular circumstances of that period. The fact that authoritarian pedagogy cannot be absent from the interpretation of Herbart typical to our age can be associated with the statement of the same period.

9. In the 1970s, respected scholars reminded the *métier* [of education] of that it was time to interpret and understand the classical figures of the history of education objectively and to compile updated monographs. Magda Dénes's monograph is considered to be a vital piece about the history of education written in that period, because she undertook to interpret and understand the pedagogy of Herbart. Subsequent to the publication of this monograph, the review of it concurrently informs the readers that it is most likely not satisfactory enough to make others become more interested in the primary sources concerning Herbart after all.

10. After the political changes in 1989, it was conceptualized that such an interpretation on Herbart would become general that would contain the synthesis of previous reflections (nine interpretations disseminated herein) in a way that statements typical to the Soviet socialist period as well as definitions that were used to assess not only Herbart but also other streams of pedagogy would be omitted. Based on these, Herbart is indeed an excellent pedagogue; he is a systematizing

mastermind, the scientific founder of pedagogy. Moreover, his gravity is eminent in view of moral education, but many of his conclusions cannot be verified today. Basically, he is the representative of an obsolete system and created intellectualistic pedagogy and mechanic psychology. He paid no attention to the physical education or particular psychological properties of children. He was a pedagogue preferring authoritarianism which, among many, manifested itself in the subordination of students to teachers/educators in the course of education and teaching.

11. In consequence of the foregoing, interpretations that produced new results in view of Herbartian pedagogy should be highlighted and recognized, and such results can be ascribed to Béla Pukánszky, Tibor Lázár and Erzsébet Fehér. It is believed that professional reflections created domestically can be used as a basis when creating a new interpretation on Herbart. At this point, primarily the work of Ernő Fináczy and Magda Dénes should be underlined, but further books, chapters and studies completed domestically and imparted herein are also

considered to be momentous, because the professional research affiliated with them exerted efforts to understand the primary sources and, from time to time, recognized the necessity of the reassessment of interpretations on Herbart typical to particular periods of the history of education. The current framework of the interpretation on Herbart accepted domestically is represented by such professional research and conclusions. This dissertation lists new conclusions in addition to other domestic results.

The interpretation of a pedagogue desiring to systematize that kept returning in the descriptions has been questioned. According to research imparted herein, although Herbart can be categorized as a systematizing pedagogue, it might be more accurate to state that he was a pedagogue that endeavoured systematization. The quintessence of his pedagogy does not really lie in his system but rather in the structure of his pedagogy and in the creation of scientific terminology.

Much of the criticism levelled at Herbart was written in two areas, namely the theory of education and moral education. If it is desired to demonstrate Herbart's

results, it is important to show what critics recognize in addition to the above two areas: elucidation in regard to the theory of education as well as something that his judges fail to mention at all: the general principles and terms of education that were ahead of science and served as a prerequisite for the scientific regime. Herbart designated the field of pedagogy, defined its terminology, and demarcated its theorem which eventually enabled him to systematize. Similarly to textbooks, professional discourse lacks the clear correlation of the theory of education: the objective of education is to make children become open-minded and to develop their multilateral interest. Whenever their wide-ranging knowledge has been achieved via the aesthetical depiction of the world surrounding them might we speak of moral decisions that novices make, and not their teachers/educators.

The most recent researches of reform pedagogy lead to an approach, namely that the principles of reform pedagogy have antecedents that can be identified in classical pedagogy. It was believed for decades that the quintessence of reform pedagogy could be captured in its reforming feature. Its features were sought in view of

confrontation potency and of its novelty. Therefore, reform pedagogy meant the renaissance of the old and under no circumstance the continuation of the old. Specific primary sources on Herbart have been referred to herein in order to contribute to doubting the vivid confrontation between classical and reform pedagogy. Herbart's notes connected with the Steiger family, and in his works titled *Über Erziehung unter öffentlicher Mitwirkung* (1810), *Bemerkungen über einen pädagogischen Aufsatz des Predigers Zippel* (1814), *Über das Verhältnis der Schule zum Leben Vorgelesen in der Deutschen Gesellschaft zu Königsberg am Krönungstage, dem 18. Januar 1818.*, and in his other opuses can convince us of his educational susceptibility and his focus on the magnitude of the children's individualities.

Similarly to reform pedagogy, the criticism of Soviet socialist pedagogy cannot be supported either. Research explained herein is connected with the assumptions of Hungarian researchers, such as Péter Szebenyi, László Brezsnyánszky, György Mikonya, elaborated in the past decades; meanwhile Soviet



socialist pedagogy attacked the Herbartian principles, it actually carried on the practices of the Prussian school/education system.

Contingent upon primary sources, the attacks of reform pedagogy and Soviet socialist pedagogy this way can be understood not so categorically in view of Herbart, but rather of Herbartianism or the Herbart Paradigm defined in the terminology of Chapter II herein.

The analyses of Herbart's pedagogy, therefore, has led to the conclusion that Herbart lay the foundation of such general principles that must be contemplated by all educators/teachers even today, if they desire to perform efficient education. The fact that he answered his questions in a different way contrary to reform pedagogy and Soviet socialist pedagogy addressing criticism later in time should not mean that the two concepts referred to or other pedagogical streams responding differently to the Herbartian questions would not have followed him at least in their courses of questioning.



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### List of publications related to the dissertation

#### Hungarian book chapter(s) (3)

- Bicsák Zs.Á.**: A herbarti pedagógia és a reformpedagógiai elvek szembeállításának problémája.  
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14. Kissné Rusvai J., **Bicsák Zs.Á.**: Adalékok a Nyíregyházi Tanárképző Főiskola és a Tanítóképző Intézet füzójához.  
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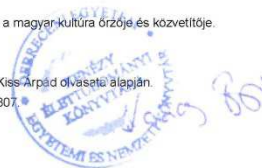
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