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*The Problem of Child Rearing
in Sofia Rusova's Pedagogical Concept*

Problemy wychowania dzieci w pedagogicznej koncepcji Sofii Rusovej

ABSTRACT

The article covers actual problems of child rearing as interpreted by a Ukrainian social educator and public figure Sofia Rusova (1856–1940). Rusova incorporated in her pedagogical concept progressive ideas and hypotheses of European and world classics of the education theory as well as Ukrainian and foreign teaching experience under existing historical, social and economic conditions. She studied objective laws and patterns of society, nature, individuals, peculiarities of nations, their world view and level of culture which enabled her to clearly define the purpose and content of preschool and school-age children's education. The most important principles of her pedagogical concept include humanism, democracy, national spirit, nature-friendly attitude, cultural conformity, personality-oriented approach, and social predestination of education. At the centre of her concept Rusova placed a child with its congenital inclinations, abilities, and capabilities.

Key words: education; child; pedagogical concept; the purpose of education; kindergarten; new school; the content of education; Sofia Rusova

INTRODUCTION

In the course of historical and pedagogical process a certain logical shift of pedagogical paradigms can be traced. The process undoubtedly involves the emergence and development of new concepts of education, new models of pre-schools and schools. At the turn of the 20th century, the revival of the Ukrainian nation

gains momentum and causes increase in activity of progressive intellectuals, who strive for education, science and culture. Life and work, ideas and attitudes of educators and enlighteners of the mentioned period, their pedagogical heritage, even though often ignored or prohibited on the territory of the Soviet Union, did not go unnoticed by the contemporaries and scholars outside the Soviet Union during the inter-war period also in the second half of the 20th century and still remains an interest-provoking chapter of the Ukrainian pedagogy today.

Sofia Rusova occupies the prominent place in a constellation of celebrated Ukrainian teachers, classics of education theory, whose rich heritage has entered the golden foundation of pedagogy. Rusova was born in a French-Swedish family in Chernihiv Region and has been raised in Ukraine. She lived in Kyiv where she graduated from a classical school. During 9 years, she merged into the Ukrainian environment of the renowned Lysenko and Starytskyi families acquiring a deep respect and love for Ukraine and Ukrainians among whom she lived and worked. She was a true example of a refined European lady capable of appreciating and respecting the language and culture of the people whom she lived among.

THE CHILD IN SOFIA RUSOVA'S PEDAGOGICAL CONCEPT

A child's personality and individuality with its natural inclinations, abilities, talents, needs and aspirations are in the center of Rusova's pedagogical concept. "As no two bushes in the garden are alike, so no two children with the same feelings, thoughts, capabilities there can be in a class", she noted (Rusova 1914, p. 4). She was trying to answer the questions: what is a child, what is its personality, individuality, and what are the factors of its formation and development just from the beginning of her teaching career. The first chapter of the book by Rusova *Theory and Practice of Preschool Education*, entitled *What Is a Child*, provides an attempt at a comprehensive answer to these and other questions. Every child is a result of a complex biological and anthropological process. In its embryonic development, the child passes various stages and forms of organic life, acquires features learned by a man throughout a millennia-long culture process and presents distinctive anthropological features referring the child to a particular race, nation, and nationality. However, she also has individual traits inherited from her parents. On the one hand, the child is a product of the immediate legacy of an individual (ontogeny), and of biological and anthropological influences (phylogeny), on the other. Thus, a human being should be viewed "as a completely natural, biological being and a part of society at the same time" (Rusova 1924b, p. 3). A person is a biological being by its nature. By the means of accommodation, imitation and adopting habits, the child gradually gains vitality, develops physically, intellectually and mentally. Biological changes manifest themselves in age stages of deve-

lopment and behaviour being reflected in specific biological traces of childhood, youth, maturity and old age.

Rusova was interested in biological factors of a childhood, educational tools and methods that promote the most efficient development of natural instincts and abilities of individuals. She tried to base her pedagogical analysis and theoretical research on the latest achievements of modern psychology, medicine, anatomy, physiology, biology and other sciences of man using works of Binet, Baldwin, Weismann, Gross, Darwin, Lai, Pere, Stern, Strummer, etc. There is an individual, a person; every child is a product of a biological and historical evolution. On top of that attitude "Man is man only in the community. Awareness of law, morals and will, develop in the community only while establishing contacts with people. For an individual separated from public life there is no law, no unconditional idea of good. Moral and legal laws, moral tasks and responsibilities are crystallized only in the community of people" (Rusova 1924a, p. 6).

Human's personality arises from activity and develops within the society. It is constantly influenced by the economic, political, cultural and other social factors, which according to Rusova, constitute the social environment for formation of the identity. Formation of personality is a long and complex dialectical process of socialization of an individual, which allows the child to acquire moral and psychological qualities, learn rules and norms of behaviour, and obtain social consciousness. So, "by understanding integration of a person into the institution of citizenship, imagining every charity imposed on him/her by social responsibilities we are able to explain how we must conduct social education if we want its consequence to be a real development of the sense of citizenship, a greater number of intelligent and active members in it" (Rusova 1924a, p. 11).

Having an extensive teaching experience, comprehensive and deep theoretical knowledge Rusova defined the purpose of education clearly distinguishing between main pedagogical categories and notions, fully disclosing the role, place and significance of major factors of a child's formation and development (education, inheritance, environment), which is to "assist the free evolution of spiritual and physical strength of the child" (Rusova 1918, p. 9), "celebrate the cult of personality that freely engages all creative forces" (Rusova 1918, p. 15), "develop a person with a broad understanding of his/her civic duties, of an independent, refined intelligence, with brotherly feelings towards all mankind, a person capable of labor, a person who would not die physically and morally, no matter what circumstances may be, and who would firmly defend his/her beliefs" (Rusova 1913, p. 37).

Rusova argued J. Herbart's position, who recommended disturbing the child's peaceful soul, binding it with faith and endearment so that it could be easy to cause disquiet and controversy. "This is anything but a positive recommendation. No child must be disturbed. Conversely, we should listen to what dominates the

pure depth and by all means gratify the best aspirations, find the ways to gradually eliminate anything that could harm the child itself and its environment” (Rusova 1918, p. 8).

However, she pointed to the enormous power of educational influence on the formation and development of the child and the need for a focused and systemic exposure to this under teachers’ guidance. A teacher should be a mere onlooker of a growing, developing child, the latter will seek active influence, authority without that it feels helpless and unprotected. And then our influence risks being ousted by a factor that would negatively affect the child. A teacher must be ready to take responsibility, gain benefit from his or her impact on a child, appreciate obedience and seek ways to better guide the child. However, such a suggestion must not limit the child’s will or independent thoughts but rather emphasize and moderate its independent progress.

The teacher’s responsibility is quite extensive as it is the person who decides where to direct the child’s energy. One should first examine the child’s mental and physical condition and understand what attracts or discourages it. It is necessary to affectionately evoke trust and confidence in order to eliminate fright between the teacher and the child (Rusova 1927b, p. 12).

THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Rusova defined the purpose of education based on historical and socio-economic conditions, objective laws and patterns of society, nature, individuals, peculiarities of nations, their world view and level of culture, progressive ideas and hypotheses of European and world classics of the education theory, and a valuable Ukrainian and foreign teaching experience, as well. Her analysis of works by J. Komensky, J. Rousseau, J. Locke, J. Pestalozzi, J. Herbart, F. Froebel, M. Montaigne, P. Lesgaft and others presented two historically established approaches to the purpose of education: 1 – preferring the development of mind, thought, thinking (Socrates, Mill, Montaigne, etc.); 2 – preferring the development of will, character, sense (Kant, Rousseau, Lesgaft, etc.). Rusova concluded that “only ultimate attention to all physical and spiritual manifestations can provide for an all-round development of the body and spirit” (Rusova 1927b, p. 3).

Deeply aware of the importance of a clear definition of major structural components of education, Rusova paid considerable attention to interpretation of the educational ideal. She meant by this that each nation had attained it over centuries of cultural existence. The Ukrainian educational values lie in saving the positive experience for future generations’ education, the healthy family lifestyle and moral purity. Their predictability manifests itself in the ability to incorporate not only the traditions but also current tasks. The process of education involves the development of spiritual needs for cognition and self-cognition, the beauty of relation-

ship and communication, whereas the main precondition for morality is humanness combining love for the man, compassion, kindness, care, empathy skills, willingness to help, tolerance.

Analyzing the human and democratic interpretation of education by the Ukrainian, European and world intelligentsia, their vision of an ideal man, Rusova came up with the eventual concept of a man as a patriot of his homeland. In her opinion, the purpose of education should be dictated by life itself, the development of contemporary society, a long and exhausting struggle of many Ukrainian generations for their statehood.

Rusova's ideas originated from viable sources of popular pedagogy which idealized the man of labor, noble and conscious of his human and national dignity. Sharing views of K. Ushinsky, I. Ohienko, Ya. Chepiga, M. Haluschynskyi, I. Yushchyshyn and others, she claimed that children should "be plunged" into the native national environment from birth, they should absorb their mother tongue and culture and thus gradually near universal knowledge.

According to Rusova, the purpose of education, is a reflection of humane and democratic ideas of the progressive Ukrainian intelligentsia of the late 19th–early 20th centuries about the ideal man and a prediction of what a man should eventually become i.e. a patriot of his homeland. Moreover, the purpose of education is not static, it solves immediate problems that arise at the given stage of social development, determining the nature of interaction between the teacher and the child and providing guidance for the future.

PECULIARITIES OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

Rusova progressed from first empirical pedagogical attempts to theoretical generalization that eventually allowed her to become a prominent theorist of preschool education and create her own concept as well. Her understanding of the content, forms, methods and means of education is reflected in the following works: *Theory and Practice of Preschool Education*, *The Woman's Role in Preschool Education*, *National Aspects of Preschool Education*, *Nationalization of Preschool Education*, *New Methods of Preschool Education* and others.

Rusova founded the first Ukrainian kindergarten in Kyiv (1871), headed the Ukrainian branch of the Froebel Institute, where she taught a course of preschool education, organized numerous nurseries and children's homes in Ukraine and abroad. She used the experience of well-known educators (F. Froebel, M. Montessori, F. Disterveg, J. Pestalozzi, J. Rousseau, etc.) while elaborating on her concept of preschool education. In her work entitled *Preschool Education* she exploited pedagogical ideas of Montessori, namely "a new kindergarten", "nomenclature lessons" that develop the child's abstract thinking, scrutinizing teachers' role in education. Rusova agreed that it is important to teach a young child how to feel

and perceive various configurations of objects around, to train to be independent from the early childhood. She admired Montessori's attentive treatment of the child's soul which required an individual approach.

Rusova was convinced that the main purpose of preschool education is not to supply the child with ready knowledge, even if basic, but evoke the child's spiritual strength, stir up interest, cultivate emotions so that the child's eyes would be able to see, ears – to listen, little hands – to work with a pencil, scissors, clay and paper. A kindergarten should be all imbued with the national spirit. The scholar paid much attention to aesthetic education as a factor that should make the most of children's creative inclinations. She recommended accompanying different types of activities (observation, reading, telling stories) with drawing as it is the sincere and independent language of the child.

The pleasant atmosphere of a kindergarten is conducive to identification of the child's creative abilities. So, Rusova advised to shy away from criticism as it could adversely affect the child. For children events should combine folklore and common cultural elements, offering a chance to enjoy the aesthetic pleasure. She was convinced that without knowledge of the native language the overall development of the child was impossible. That is why so much importance was given to the folklore by her. The language nurses the child's heart and soul from the early childhood. So, Rusova thoroughly developed methods of teaching and education that explored problems of language skills development and learning, science of numbers, moral and social education, teacher training, etc. Love for the motherland begins with love for mother, family, home, neighborhood, kindergarten, hometown, the place where the person was born. This leads us to the close unity and understanding among the peoples and nations.

Rusova along with the ideas of the free development of the child, the necessity to study its physiological peculiarities, a harmonious unity with nature, addressed another crucial question: should preschool education be based on national originality or not?

THE CONCEPT OF A NEW SCHOOL

A number of Rusova's pedagogical works are devoted to the problem of a new school. The purpose of school is to teach children facts of life (Rusova 1913, p. 35). The purpose of a new Ukrainian school is to "excite and arouse independent creative forces of the child" (Rusova 1914, p. 4). Unfortunately, the contemporary Ukraine did not possess its own school.

The new school should "absorb all available expertise of foreign reformers while preserving its national form, responding to the urgent needs, national demands of the people" (Rusova 1913, p. 36). A new type of school can be created

and the most advanced achievements of theoretical and practical pedagogy should be expertly implemented. A new school should create a lively and cheerful atmosphere, a friendly relationship between students and teachers, establish a humane attitude towards people and all living things.

Rusova provided a theoretical basis for such a school which would be the golden key that “opens the shackles of ignorance, shows the path to freedom, science, and prosperity as real treasures of every nation” (Rusova 1914, p. 3). Having analyzed the state of education on the Ukrainian territories from the beginning of the 17th to the beginning of the 20th century, Rusova concluded that “modern Ukrainian school does not provide education for children, because it contradicts all pedagogical requirements, all needs of life; it cripples the mind and soul of the child, separates the child from the family and abandons it at a crossroads, gives no decent upbringing or education, does not comply with the Ukrainian national spirit; people have lost faith in it and do not hold it in high esteem as they should a truly popular school” (Rusova 1914, pp. 4–5).

Rusova claimed that the new school should prepare its students for future life, for the implementation of the ideal, which still fills up the hearts of the best citizens, and, therefore, it has to fertilize the soil of the national culture. Education must “develop a person with a broad understanding of his/her civic duties, of an independent, refined intelligence, with brotherly feelings towards all mankind, a person capable of labor, a person who would not die physically and morally, no matter what circumstances may be, and who would firmly defend his/her beliefs” (Rusova 1913, p. 37). Hence the need for qualitative changes in the curriculum to which “more disciplines that mould public consciousness such as history and geography of the native land as well as popular arts – music, singing, study of ornaments – should be introduced” (Rusova 1996, p. 296).

According to Rusova, the native language as well as local country studies and culture, both based on common intellectual and moral achievements, give the meaning to education and upbringing of the child. No matter what problem Rusova touched upon, she viewed patriotic upbringing as the main prerequisite for successful education and the native language as its main tool. She was deeply convinced that the native tongue is not only a powerful means of the child's mental development, but also an important factor of social integration. Learning the mother tongue is the first psychological requirement for a man and a nation – it is important to “master knowledge with the help of the language which I understand best and which my spiritual being is bound with, which evokes ideas in my mind and links new impressions to the old ones so smoothly, so well” (Rusova 1996, p. 293). The child needs to learn with the help of the native dialect not to suppress the spiritual nature, inhibit the inborn activity of the mind, and restrain interest. So, Rusova believed that the bilingual (utraquist) school “is not only an

evil mockery of healthy science of pedagogy, but also inadmissible when it comes to schooling (...) it's a pedagogical nonsense and, on top of that, a life crime" as such schools "can only do damage to students and the state" (Rusova 1936, p. 14).

According to Rusova, the best means of patriotic education of students in primary and secondary schools are local country studies (Ukrainian studies) (Rusova 1933, p. 33). To substantiate her views, Rusova addressed the contemporary European pedagogical practices (Germany, Slovakia, Moravia, etc.) in the realm of country studies (Rusova 1933, pp. 29–30). The author stated that the term "country studies" (from the word "country") reflects educational objectives and content of the school subject appropriately and also is capable of uniting various subjects into an integral and harmonious structure for harmony and integrity appeal to the child's mind (Rusova 1933, p. 25). Country studies represent abovementioned complexity as it reflects the life of the compatriots, the homeland. It is worth saying that this problem was not new and has been brought up as far back as in the 17th century by J. Komensky. All nations have own long tradition of understanding this term. For example, in Germany it is called "home studies". J. Herder dedicated some of his works to the theoretical justification of the role and value of "home studies" in the formation of a nationally conscious personality. K. Ushinsky noted that in Western Europe children were obliged to learn the native language, literature, geography, history of their homeland, etc. (Ushynskij 1954, p. 402), as the knowledge of homeland is as important "as the ability to read, write and count, exercise religion. This is a clear pedagogical axiom; it seems that it's time for us to understand it and bring into public education" (Ushynskij 1954, p. 407).

Rusova argued that country studies are the very foundation and the field on which the national school and education of active and conscious citizens, patriots should be based (Rusova 1933, p. 33). An important function of country studies lies in the fact that it brings school closer to real life. She notes great interest in country studies in Eastern Ukraine, namely, Odessa, Kyiv, Lubny, Luhansk, Vinnytsia, Korostyshiv, Uman, Mariupol, etc. in the 1920s.

Country studies must form in students a holistic concept of the hometown and home country. Children must have a good knowledge of their native environment in different dimensions: historical, linguistic, natural, national, cultural and others. In addition, they must understand and realize that "one must not only obtain everything that one needs for life from the womb of native land, its cornfields, forests and waters, but one must also offer something in return through education, enlivening public life and popular culture. This circulation from homeland to homeland reveals a civic duty of every citizen – an ability to extract natural wealth of the country through unremitting work, agriculture, animal husbandry, crafts but also education, research and improve the economic conditions of the countrymen. It is, one might say, social significance of one's homeland knowledge" (Rusova 1933, p. 26).

Rusova believed that history should draw children's attention to cultural contributions, moral victories, technical and scientific discoveries. The child must feel a strong bond with heroes of the past who sacrificed their lives for the truth, for a better future of their people, for humane and scientific aspirations (Rusova 1927a, p. 57). Local geography should set the first stone of the foundation on which conscious patriotism can be built. Studying geography (namely, physical) and history should lead to "a harmonious elucidation of the native environment for students to learn the conscious treatment of the local nature and their historical past" (Rusova 1996, p. 296). Formation of patriotism in children must start with cultivating love for the native land, because the child is able to love only what it knows. It must be given a chance to explore by children their close and further surroundings, every river, forest, lake, neighbouring villages and infrastructure; they should learn how to distinguish the flora and fauna, local trades and craftwork. But love for native land should overpass isolating national egoism, for by loving its people the child must recognize the merits of other people and respect them. To gain these aims, children must observe various national festivals. So, social education consists in forming a deeply conscious citizen, a son of his land. Rusova advised teachers to use such educational forms as trips to near and remote areas which might be useful in geographical, historical or economic respects and may lead to establish a school-based or district local history museum.

CONCLUSIONS

Rusova's pedagogical ideas have not lost their relevance. They are valuable for all those involved in education of young generations. The most important principles of her pedagogical concept are humanism, democracy, national spirit, nature-friendly attitude, cultural conformity, personality-oriented approach, and social predestination of education. The main factors facilitating the child's formation and development are education, heritage, and environment. At the centre of her pedagogical concept, she placed a child with its congenital inclinations, abilities, and capabilities. Whatever aspect of educational institutions might have been considered by Rusova – history, geography, science, music or singing – she stressed the need for a focus on personality, development of skills, natural strengths and talents. Preschools and schools become keepers of all the treasures of national culture, examples of centuries-old traditions. Educational aspects of Rusova's pedagogical concept are a prerequisite for the creation of a new theory and practice of education in Ukraine as to its form and content. And today one of the main tasks of this is to educate young people on the basis of universal values and virtues. If the root of life is not nourished by the national spirit, the man loses faith, love of life, family, people, and hope for a better future, and the survival of coming generations might be at risk.

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STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł poświęcony jest problemom wychowania dzieci w ujęciu ukraińskiej pedagog, działaczki społecznej i edukacyjnej, Sofii Rusovej (1856–1940). Swą pedagoiczną koncepcję oparła na innowacyjnych ideach, wnioskach oraz tezach klasyków europejskiej i światowej myśli pedagogicznej, a także na cennej ukraińskiej i zagranicznej praktyce edukacyjnej, z uwzględnieniem historycznych i społeczno-gospodarczych uwarunkowań. W oparciu o głębokie studium obiektywnie istniejących praw i modeli rozwoju społeczeństwa, natury, jednostek, specyfiki narodu, jego światopoglądu, poziomu rozwoju kultury, Rusova uzasadniała swą koncepcję pedagogiczną oraz definiowała cel i treść kształcenia dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym i szkolnym. Według tej koncepcji najważniejszymi zasadami są: humanizm, demokracja, duch narodowy, postawa przyjazna naturze, wrastanie w kulturę, podejście zorientowane na osobowość oraz społeczne uwarunkowanie wychowania. W centrum swej koncepcji usytuowała dzieci z ich wrodzonymi skłonnościami, umiejętnościami i zdolnościami.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja; dziecko; koncepcja pedagogiczna; cel wychowania; przedszkole; nowa szkoła; treść edukacji; Sofia Rusova