

K.D. USHINSKY:  
A THEORETICIAN OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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K.D. USHINSKY lived a short but remarkably fruitful life. Born in 1824 in Tula, he graduated from the Law Faculty of Moscow State University in 1844. He began serious work in the pedagogical sciences in the mid-fifties, his main work being carried out in Petesburg. In the years from 1862 to 1867 he lived abroad, for the most part in Switzerland with the aim of studying the experiments in the field of public education taking place there. His life ended in Odessa, in 1871.

Excellent knowledge of theory of education and school practice, deep insight in the historical development of thought in pedagogy and transformation of its tasks, combined with a remarkable awareness of the latest scientific achievements (not only in pedagogy but in many other fields of science), all this favoured him to write books which readily responded to the immediate demands of Russian public education of that time and contained a number of exquisite conceptions that until now have not lost their scientific value.

His works and especially his study-books "The World of Childhood" and "The Word of the Mother Tongue" were very popular and before 1917 had been extensively circulating in school programmes. Theoretical views of the scientist concentrated in

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his book "Man as the Subject of Upbringing" specifically influenced pedagogy of his time and the development of education as a whole.

The scientific inheritance of K.D. USHINSKY had been a subject of very close research of pre-revolutionary historians; here first should be mentioned the works by V.A. VOLKOVICH, M.L. PESKOVSKY. And yet particularly close study was initiated in the Soviet period. USHINSKY's books have been published regularly: several editions of his selected works, eleven volumes of collective works with a first-rate supplement and also his archives. A number of special reviews on his pedagogical activity presented his contribution in many aspects. The reviews were excellently done by the prominent Soviet psychologists and pedagogues: V.Y. STRUMINSKY, D.O. LORDKIPANIDZE, B.G. ANANJEV, G.S. KOSTUK, K.A. RAMUL, A.A. SMIRNOV. These researches disclosed the urgency of the problems raised by USHINSKY for our days and showed that his scientific work has been an inexhaustible source of psychological information, especially relevant to individuals dealing with the study, upbringing and education of the child. However there still remains much unknown in USHINSKY's scientific inheritance. For instance, what has not yet received proper attention the role of his work in the cause of laying the foundations of pedagogical psychology and helping it to become an independent branch of psychology. What follows in the paper is an attempt to fill in this gap.

The first article by USHINSKY, "The perspectives of pedagogical literature", is the evidence that already in the late 50-ties he formulated the main considerations which he developed all the following years. The most important of them are such key-problems as the necessity to substantiate pedagogy as a science, to define the importance of psychology as the basic foundation of a theory competent to solve pedagogical problems, the requirement to conceptualize the essence of the pedagogical process and to do this with due regard to laws of psychological and physical growth, the laws that govern the development and therefore determine the means of pedagogical control.

The theoretical level of Russian pedagogy of that time was very low "...only a few and unpopular courses in pedagogy, not a single note-worthy essay even, a translated from a European language, only a dozen or two of articles most of which are those that are said to be "ex officio", and no special pedagogical journal" (1857, p. 15) -this state of affairs was found by USHINSKY at the beginning of his activity, in the 50-ties.

A few manuals of upbringing were anchored in the traditions prevailing in the society at that time and the personal experience of teachers. Therefore there was no attempt made to create theoretical foundations of pedagogy or even to see the possibility of the theory as such. The authors of courses in pedagogy set themselves the dreary task to collect recommendations of various kind. As to teachers, USHINSKY wrote, they "...mostly mentioned pedagogical theory with a kind of strange contempt as if the names of leading theoreticians in pedagogy were either not known at all or if known then from hearsay" (1857, p. 17).

Under these conditions to set forth the problem of theoretical foundations in pedagogy meant to bring in a new element to upbringing and education that might shed a new light upon them. USHINSKY was firmly convinced that in reality the

theory and practice of education go hand in hand and are closely interconnected. He reminded that there is no teacher who in his daily practice would not be guided by his own theory no matter how vague it might be and there is no theoretician who would not, be it seldom, at the side of the domain of pure facts. He saw the solution in the position of a scientist who might transcend the diversity of the daily events in pedagogical practice and rise to the abstract principles of the theory of upbringing. Therefore he considered two things to be determining here: the character of the theoretical principles and the gift of a teacher to apply them in his everyday activity.

The authors of manuals and practical teachers of that time emphasized practical experiences, the most frequently occurring facts. USHINSKY insisted that if a fact remains, an isolated raw event, then it is of no use. Any fact must be generalized, worked through by thought. Then the thought and not the fact will direct the activity of a teacher. "What is transmitted is a thought derived from the fact but not the fact as such" (1857, p. 19). "The ideal form of connected facts, the ideal side of practice make up theory in such practical event as upbringing" (1857, p. 19). He compared upbringing which stands only upon practice with ignorance in medicine, whereas a good teacher or a qualified physician must proceed from theoretical assumptions.

This approach, with its emphasis on logical thinking, paved the way to a consequent inquiry as to what may be the components of the expected pedagogical theory and what kind of teachers training programme it might call for. Trying to find a positive solution to these two problems USHINSKY formulated as a guiding principle an original idea for the definition of the educational aims and tasks. He conceived the main target of pedagogy to be upbringing of the highly moral man, the idea contrasting with the aim of upbringing a perfect clerk or a perfect businessman.

This turn in the approach to educational tasks naturally demanded thorough scientific research into the nature of man. USHINSKY warned, "If we normally expect of any craftsman professional understanding of the essentials of his business, then it is the solemn right of society entrusting us their children to expect of us true knowledge of those whose education is our responsibility, that is knowledge of the mental and moral nature of man" (1857, p. 26-27). He emphasized further on that the necessary knowledge may be achieved only when we discover the regularities which govern the development of human psyche. He asked, "Doesn't the subject of upbringing that is, the human soul, obey specific laws just as a physical body (the subject of medicine) obeys specific physical laws? Can't we really see such laws and regularities?" (1857, p. 21)

In his conception of man as the subject of upbringing USHINSKY demanded that man be viewed as psychobiological entity. Thus he believed that the theory of pedagogical control must embrace the data of all those related sciences which "study both the physical and the spiritual spheres, and study them not as belonging to an imaginary domain but as manifested in actual phenomena" (1867, p. 22). The principle of education formulated by USHINSKY became a true motto and inspired a mass of investigations into the nature of the child. I read: "Of pedagogy wants to educate the child as a versatile being, it must first study the child in correspondingly versatile ways" (1867, p. 23).



Proclaiming the contingent character of pedagogy in relation to other sciences USHINSKY insisted that the contingency is not transitory, that it is permanent and that it is affected by the status of the related sciences and the level of their growth. He asked the question: "Can we now assemble all the facts and knowledge accumulated in sciences about the child and build up a theory of education?. I don't think we can, since the sciences studying man are far from being perfect. But should people refuse to travel by railways only for the reason that they can not fly yet?... Pedagogical theory will develop in accord with the development of the related sciences, assuming that it stops to invent groundless rules of education and consults other sciences and it if formulates a rule then it does it on the basis of true scientific data after the appropriate generalization and comparison of each accumulated fact (1867, p. 29-30).

USHINSKY considered the three sciences: psychology, physiology and logic to be the principle sources of the pedagogical theory. Among these psychology plays the first role owing to the specific character and tasks of educational process. He wrote: "Even the poorest course in pedagogy includes some system of pure psychology while pedagogical practice has always been a vast observatory for psychological research...In fact, isn't every pedagogist a psychologist in his heart?. It is he who studies the student, his abilities and fancies, virtues and shortcomings, notices the development of his mentality, guides him, directs his will, exercises mind, inhibits the evil inclinations, develops tastes, transfers the love for truth, in short, constantly operates within the framework of psychology, psychological phenomena" (1857, p. 25). If the educator does not act so he becomes a kind of machine to give homework, control award and punishment of all who happen to be at hand. "In pedagogy we use the data of many sciences and yet, psychology as seen in the perspective of applying to the needs of education, takes the most important place" (1867, p. 53). "Only psychology can introduce the educator into the world of human soul, the world as vast and versatile as the universe; only psychology can give him confidence, strength in decisions which would warrant him to lead the child along the path which he chooses according to his beliefs" (1860, 369).

Recognizing the significance of psychology USHINSKY nevertheless was perfectly aware of the actual condition of world psychology of his time and realistically understood that it was not yet ready to carry out the tasks prophesied it would, and therefore realized that the sceptical attitude to psychology was basically just. However this awareness didn't change his trust in psychology, his belief in its importance for pedagogy in principle, it only meant to him that psychology itself was to pass through a fundamental reform which will result in its becoming a true science. He wrote, "If until now, psychology if viewed as a science, has not brought any tangible results, it does not mean at all that psychology is powerless, it means that psychology is now only at the starting point of becoming a self-sufficient science" (1860, p. 368)"... It will encounter many difficulties and at first it will have to deal with trivial problems" (1860, p. 370). In these difficult beginnings, pedagogy may turn out to be actually helpful. Just as the demands of practical medicine stimulated the development of anatomy, physiology and pathology, the demands of practical pedagogy may release psychology from the bondage of speculative theories and help it to follow the route of natural-science approach to the study of the laws governing psychological

development.

The new approach to the subject of education and educational tasks was logically followed by a new interpretation of the essence of upbringing and its efficiency.

In his treatment of the essential aspects of education, USHINSKY suggested two main concepts: firstly, "the organism" and secondly, "its development". It followed from this that it was essential to consider the person being educated as a single psycho-biological entity, in which the natural qualities and his mental framework that is being formed as he goes through life, are inseparably associated and mutually influence one another. Therefore it is necessary that the mental and physical education are brought together in harmonic manner. The child himself is a constantly changing organism developing according to laws immanent; by nature he is endowed with a whole variety of potentialities and abilities but whether they manifest themselves and what aspect of these qualities will be developed depends on the quality of life and education. The large role of education in perfecting human nature reveals itself right here. By forming a high moral character in the pupils, education exerts important influence on the moral health of society. It is only possible when the aim is clear and the subject of education is understood, when the means necessary for the achievement of these aims have been thoroughly examined and tested. The key to the correct understanding of these requirements is gained by the knowledge of the laws of mental and physical human development. The need to understand the essential nature of education and its role in the social development has placed psychology among the most necessary and practically important sciences.

The concepts of "the organism" and "its development" have defined USHINSKY's views regarding factors and means of education. Every organism, though subjected to the general laws of development, is at the same time an individuality. Therefore the process of education is a dialectical process in which the educator must be extremely flexible and should be sensitive to the individual peculiarities and to circumstances of life in order to formulate a pedagogical program appropriate to a given individual and given environment. Consequently, any kind of universal pedagogical recipes is useless and the mechanical learning of "rules", presented in the traditional textbooks of pedagogy, would be simply a waste of time. "We do not say to our teachers "do this or that", but we say to them "learn the laws of those psychological manifestations which you want to control and those circumstances within which you want to develop your students". The conditions themselves are endlessly varied and the very nature of the pupils differs. It is possible, when there is such difference in conditions of life and the personalities vary, to prescribe general rules of guide-lines?. It is hardly possible to find a pedagogical procedure which in one case would yield useful results, in another case, harmful results and in a third case, no results at all. This is why we advise teachers to learn as much as possible, about the physical and mental nature of man in general, to study pupils and the surrounding conditions" (1867, p. 55-56).

With such an approach, psychology could enter the pedagogical arena quite



naturally, organically, as something essential, central and closely related to the living reality of education, as its integral part. In this way psychology provided the scientific and theoretical basis of education, with a proper subject of investigation and specific problems, that is the study of pupils in the context of the conditions which surround them and educational activities. Educational psychology, as a special branch of psychology, was born.

The significance of the theoretical thought of USHINSKY is not limited to the field of pedagogical psychology. The consideration of the three basic sources of pedagogy, that is psychology, physiology and logic in their unity and interrelations, served as a basis for exploring the links between medicine and pedagogy, between psychology and didactics. USHINSKY's efforts to relate mental activity to the physical conditions of the organism and vice versa, gave green light to a new approach in physical education: which became a necessary and important aspect of the general process of education. At the same time, the institution of measures designed to correct deviant mental and physical development during the years of school attendance lead to the formation of school hygiene as a special branch of science.

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