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Receptarea lui Rudolf Steiner, Célestin Freinet și Helen Parkhurst în  
România interbelică

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# THE RECEPTION OF RUDOLF STEINER, CÉLESTIN FREINET AND HELEN PARKHURST IN INTERWAR ROMANIA

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## **Abstract**

The article presents a theoretical and comparative approach based on primary sources, including press articles and educational publications of the time, as well as secondary sources such as pedagogical works and compendiums. The research method encompasses a historical study, that involves analysing, contrasting and comparing sources. The research premise is that although the Romanian cultural environment was peripheral during the interwar period, there was nevertheless good readiness for pedagogical innovations from Europe and America. We chose to test this hypothesis through the pedagogical contributions of Steiner, Freinet, and Helen Parkhurst. Due to the increased influence and popularity of Maria Montessori, reflected in the large number of appearances in specialized publications and in the Romanian interwar press, she was not included in this study. Future studies will address the impact of Montessori in interwar Romania. The study shows that there was a desire in the interwar specialized publications to evolve beyond the rigidity and formality of traditional Herbartian approaches. The discussions included not only laudatory, but also critical and pragmatic assessments of Pestalozzi, Rein, Dewey, Piaget, Parkhurst, Montessori, and Freinet. The research premise is partially confirmed because, among the three modern educational alternatives specified in the title, Rudolf Steiner's contributions were the least mentioned and appreciated in the Romanian literature during the interwar period. Steiner was more commonly

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known for his “anthroposophy” concerns rather than his pedagogical views. Upon Steiner’s death, Lucian Blaga wrote a laudatory article that briefly mentioned the Austrian educator’s educational views.

**Keywords:** Célestin Freinet, Helen Parkhurst, history of pedagogy, Interwar period, Rudolf Steiner.

### **Rezumat**

*Articolul înfățișează o abordare teoretică, comparativă și se bazează pe surse primare, articole din presă și publicațiile educaționale ale vremii și surse secundare, lucrări și compendii de pedagogie, iar metoda de cercetare se circumscrie studiului istoric, implicând analiza, contrastarea și compararea surselor. Premiza de cercetare de la care am pornit este că, deși în perioada interbelică mediul cultural românesc era unul periferic, în acest spațiu s-a putut manifesta totuși o receptivitate pentru inovațiile pedagogice din Europa și de peste ocean, selectând să probăm ipoteza pe contribuțiile pedagogice ale lui Steiner, Freinet și Helen Parkhurst. Menționăm că datorită influenței sporite și a popularității Mariei Montessori, resimțită prin numărul mare de apariții în publicațiile de profil și în presa românească interbelică, aceasta nu a fost inclusă în studiu, urmând ca mai multe abordări viitoare să trateze montessorianismul în România interbelică. Studiul arată că publicațiile de profil din perioada interbelică s-a manifestat dorința de a evolua dincolo de rigiditatea și formalismul tradițional, herbartian, fiind aduși în discuție nu numai în mod laudativ, dar și critic și pragmatic Pestalozzi, Rein, Dewey, Piaget, Parkhurst, Montessori și Freinet. Premisa de cercetare se confirmă parțial, deoarece dintre cele trei alternative educaționale moderne specificate în titlu, contribuția lui Rudolf Steiner a fost cea mai puțin menționată și apreciată în spațiul editorial românesc în perioada investigată, Steiner fiind mai degrabă cunoscut pentru preocupările sale de „antroposofie” decât pentru vederile sale pedagogice. La moartea lui Steiner, Lucian Blaga a scris un articol laudativ în care a menționat foarte pe scurt vederile educaționale ale pedagogului austriac.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Célestin Freinet, Helen Parkhurst, istoria pedagogiei, perioada interbelică, Rudolf Steiner.

## 1. Introduction

In the modern era, various innovators continued to transform the educational landscape. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, figures such as Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner (founder of Waldorf pedagogy), Célestin Freinet, and Helen Parkhurst (creator of the Dalton Plan) introduced alternative pedagogical methods that fundamentally changed traditional approaches. These methods promoted the development of the children's autonomy, creativity, and adaptability, having a significant impact on social and cultural development. The historical study of these educational innovations is essential to understanding how education has evolved and improved, while adapting to the changing needs of the society. These innovators challenged the educational paradigms of their time and offered new perspectives on the learning process, contributing to the improvement of educational practices and the development of a knowledge-based society.

We begin from the premise that the idea uniting modern pedagogical alternatives is the focus on the needs, interests, and experiences of the child, and that the Romanian environment in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, although situated on the periphery of the more vibrant cultural environment of the West, was largely receptive to pedagogical innovations coming from Europe. Numerous attempts to replace the traditional education system with new forms took place at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The rigidity and formalism of the Herbartian model became increasingly apparent in the face of growing demands on schools and in light of the progress made by psychological and physiological sciences in understanding the child. The focus of the educational process, primarily on the logic of science rather than on children's learning, the disregard for age-specific and individual characteristics, and the lack of differentiated work led, especially among the advocates of the New Education movement, to a search for other forms of organizing the educational process – one which was more flexible, more adaptable, and closer to the nature of the child and his spontaneous interests. Some of these methods, such as the project method, the Dalton Plan, the method of interest centers, the Winnetka system, the complex method, the Jena Plan, and the Montessori method, quickly became known in many countries in Europe and in America, initially enjoying a certain popularity because, in contrast to the uniformity and rigidity of traditional

classes, they introduced a flexible system, a favorable climate for children's active and spontaneous participation, and stimulated their individual interests, inclinations, and aptitudes.

## **2. The Waldorf Pedagogy**

One of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century alternative pedagogies, Waldorf education, focuses on the harmonious development of children through artistic, musical, physical, and spiritual education. The name "Waldorf" comes from the first Waldorf school, which was founded in 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany, for the children of employees at the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory. Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), the founder of Waldorf pedagogy, was invited to design and lead it, using his theories to create an innovative educational model. The name "Waldorf" remained associated with this educational model and was adopted by schools that embraced this pedagogical method. Nine years later, the first Waldorf school in North America opened in New York. The movement continued to grow, eventually becoming the largest alternative model in terms of number of schools and children involved: 900 schools and 1600 early childhood programs across six continents (Amrine, 2011).

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Waldorf school was an educational institution that based its methods and practices on the principles of anthroposophy, a spiritual philosophy developed by Rudolf Steiner. Waldorf schools applied a holistic approach to education, emphasizing the harmonious development of the whole being and integrating scientific, artistic, and cultural knowledge (McDermott, 2009).

The system involved an education that included both practical and theoretical activities, based on a curriculum that evolved according to the needs and interests of the children. It focused on the children's development through art, music, gymnastics, and practical activities, as well as through experiential learning at their own pace, encouraging creativity and independent thinking. This was achieved through a personalized approach to learning, which adapted to the needs and interests of each child. According to these principles, the child develops by going through several stages, each with its own characteristics that require specific pedagogical approaches (Steiner, 1994;

1996; 2016a). In Waldorf classrooms, teachers were encouraged to rely on creativity and imagination to create lessons and activities that were tailored to the needs of their students. Teachers were also encouraged to develop a relationship of trust with each child, allowing them to understand and respond to their unique needs (Steiner, 1996). Contributing to the surge of new ideas about pedagogy at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Steiner argued that the ability to educate required a sense of responsibility. An educator had to realize that s/he had a major impact on the lives of young people. It was essential to be aware that teachers were not only imparting knowledge, but also shaping the personality and character of the children (Steiner, 1997, p. 13; Steiner, 2016b).

Rudolf Steiner discussed four components of the human being that educators had to work with: the physical body, the etheric or life body, the astral body or body of feeling, and the “I”-body. He also described the soul of feeling, the soul of rational understanding, the soul of consciousness, and the higher components of human nature: the spiritual self and the spirit of life, which evolve differently at various stages of life. In his view, the proper foundations of education were based on the understanding of these laws of human nature’s evolution (Steiner 1994). Here, we must take into account that Steiner’s thinking was influenced by 19<sup>th</sup> century German Romanticism and the works of Goethe and Friedrich Schelling, particularly in terms of philosophical and aesthetic thought. Crucially, Steiner was also influenced by the theosophical movement, in which he was initially involved (Brandt & Hammer, 2013). Theosophy (“knowledge of the divine”), founded in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, and William Quan Judge through the establishment of a society by the same name, promoted the idea that there is a universal spiritual wisdom underlying all religions and philosophies of the world, and that this wisdom can be accessed through an individual search for knowledge and spiritual development (Steiner, 2003). Steiner’s deep involvement in esoteric beliefs, as the founder of anthroposophy, sometimes led to his isolation both academically and culturally during his lifetime. Some scholars criticized him for the lack of scientific rigor in his assertions, or more recently, for his views on race (Staudenmaier, 2008).

The main characteristics of the Waldorf method included an emphasis on the harmonious development of the child, integrating scientific, cultural, and artistic knowledge; respect for the natural rhythms of life, which included

the child's physical, emotional, and intellectual development; the creation of a lively and creative learning environment that encouraged children to explore and discover the world around them; the use of learning techniques that engage all of the child's senses, including hands-on and artistic activities such as painting, sculpture, music, and theater; respect for each child's individuality and the adaptation of education to their needs and characteristics; as well as the development of a sense of responsibility and respect for nature and for other people (Steiner, 1995). At the end of each school year no grades were given, but rather individual reports. In these reports, the students were not compared to a general standard or norm, but to themselves: what were their strengths and weaknesses, what efforts and progress were made during the year. The report was meant to be supportive and constructive. Only in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade were grades given, as they were required in the public system (Dahlin, 2017).

Rudolf Steiner's connections with the German community in Transylvania are little known in Romanian historiography, but they remain notable. He visited Transylvania in 1889, during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and gave a lecture in Sibiu. This connection was made possible thanks to Steiner's friendship with Moritz Zitter, likely a Jew who was originally from Galicia and had been educated in Sibiu, whom Steiner met in the academic circles of Vienna. Zitter published the journal *Deutsche Lesehalle* in Sibiu, in which Steiner contributed an essay titled "Ein freier Blick in die Gegenwart [A Free Look at the Present]" (König, 1998), where he made general assertions about German intellectuals and philosophers. In 1900, in Romanian press made references to Steiner's literary critique of Ibsen's theater (*Cronica literară*, 1900) and after World War I, Romanian periodicals increasingly referenced his work as a promoter of anthroposophy (*Patria*, 1922; *Mișcarea antroposofică*, 1922; *Congresul antroposofic*, 1922; *Presa*, 1923). In an announcement marking his death in *Mișcarea*, journalist Ionel Botez only mentioned Steiner's contributions to occultism and philosophy (1925). Likely motivated by this limited reception of Steiner's personality, Lucian Blaga published an article (1926) explaining Steiner's anthroposophy as a methodical and critical European approach to the controversial Theosophy, thus defending a way of thinking sometimes viewed as excessively "fantastical", and further stated that in Steiner's view the ideal of Europe's education would have meant the replacement of traditional schools with "temples of

education” (Blaga, 1926). Nearly a decade later, in 1934, through the indirect influence of the founder of Waldorf schools, the Romanian Anthroposophical Society was established in Bucharest (Buleu, 2015).

Essentially, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Waldorf pedagogy was based on a holistic and personalized approach to education, focusing on the harmonious development of children through art, music, gymnastics, and practical activities, encouraging creativity and independent thinking. This approach promoted multidisciplinary learning, emphasizing imagination, practical, artistic, and intellectual aspects (Steiner, 1996). Through his extraordinary ability and sustained effort, Steiner made significant theoretical and practical contributions to philosophy, science, social sciences, arts, education, and religion (Lachman, 2007). However, his reception in Romania, particularly through the lens of pedagogy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was limited and followed other aspects of his work.

### **3. The Freinet Pedagogy**

Another important contribution to early 20<sup>th</sup> century pedagogy belongs to Célestin Freinet (1896-1966), who based his work on concepts such as education through work, the principle of learning by error, group learning, cooperative work, and learning through personal experiences. He is regarded as one of the founders of modern pedagogy and had a major impact on education in France and other countries. In collaboration with his wife, Élise Freinet – the founder of *École moderne française* (the Modern School Movement) – he laid the foundation for a type of school that aimed to provide children from all social backgrounds with equal access to education, as well as to educate and develop them as independent citizens of a new society (Koerrenz et al., 2018).

Freinet began developing his method in the 1920s while working as a teacher in a rural school in southern France. He created a method based on learning through activities, where children were involved in practical activities and projects that allowed them to learn through experience. He developed techniques such as workshops, the class press (a periodic publication by children), and school correspondence, which were used to enable children



to freely express their opinions and learn through communication with other children. He also advocated for the use of modern technology, such as typewriters and printing presses, to allow children to produce their own writings and publications. The school printing center is a facility based on Freinet's own ideas, available for trainee teachers, teachers, students, and pupils (Koerrenz et al., 2018).

Essentially, Freinet's pedagogy focused on developing children's autonomy and creativity through practical activities and projects that allowed children to learn through experience, and it was based on a personalized approach to learning. Freinet had a major impact on modern education through his innovative methods and by encouraging freedom and creativity in learning. He advocated the idea that children should be actively involved in their learning process and should be encouraged to express their opinions and develop their own thinking (Koerrenz et al., 2018).

In the Romanian context, there is mention of "experimental" schools whose emergence was made possible with the adoption of the *Law for the Organization and Functioning of Primary and Normal Education* (art. 73) in 1939. Thus, in Zebil, Tulcea County, in Budești and Domnești, Ilfov County, and in Grădiștea, Vâlcea County, Montessori's sensorial-motor intervention methods and Freinet's typographic method were used (Cuciureanu, 2011; also see Bânda & Dobândă, 2015; Pettini, 1992; Rădulescu, 1999). This may have been a consequence of the spread of Freinet's ideas in the interwar cultural press, although mentions were not particularly numerous. For instance, *Rampa* gave a brief notice about the discussion sparked by an article by Freinet on the typographic technique in *Monde* (Rampa, 1930). The magazine *Școala și familia de mâine*, self-titled as the "monthly magazine for the propagation of new education and teaching methods" (*Școala Vremii*, 1934, p. 32), dedicated an article to "Health and Body Harmony: The Foundations of Rational Education by C. Freinet [Sănătatea și armonia corpului. Bazele educației raționale de C. Freinet]" (1933), and in the tenth-anniversary issue, it also published a message from Freinet (*Școala și familia de mâine*, 1937). *Lupta* provided an extensive report in the article "Let the Children Discover Life on Their Own [Lăsați copiii să descopere singuri viața]" (1936) about Ovide Decroly's (1871-1932) school in Belgium and mentioned *L'imprimerie à l'école* (1927) by

Freinet. In the publications *Adevărul*, *Patria*, and *Dreptatea*, observations appear from a Romanian delegate at the Pedagogical Congress in Paris on July 29, 1937, where Freinet spoke about the aforementioned typographic method (Adevărul, 1937; Dreptatea, 1937; Patria, 1937). The typographic or printing method is also discussed in a report on Marin Biciulescu's work, "Reforms and New Trends in Western Schools..." (a reference to Biciulescu, 1937) in *Curentul* (1937) and the same publication is presented in *Școala Vremii* (1937) with the addition that the French educator "managed to bring a true reform to schools through educational means such as the press or printing in schools, the gramophone, etc., as well as through a very special teaching method" (*Școala Vremii*, 1937, p. 26). *Curentul* mentions that:

"...[Freinet] has created, after much experience and study, a series of teaching techniques capable of transforming the school, effectively contributing to the renewal of the current school system, in line with the theoretical ideas of modern educators. His techniques: the gramophone in school and teaching music and rhythmic education lessons using the gramophone, teaching grammar, language, arithmetic, history, and geography lessons with the help of the school filing system (which has not yet been discussed here), the use of projection and cinema devices, etc., all supported by the use of printing, have recently seen development and encouragement, even from official bodies." (Tacu, 1938, p. 3)

The author of this editorial signal further recommends the dissemination of Freinet's work to the teaching staff, the inspection body, and to education officials for the implementation of these methods in the context of interwar Romanian education, as well as to candidates for advancement exams (in teaching ranks) and for tenure ("definitivat"), once again emphasizing the originality of the work within the landscape of writings in the field during that period (*Curentul*, 1938). An interesting and candid testimony comes from a Romanian teacher in the article "School Printing. The Method of Centers of Interest and the New Curriculum" in *Școala Vremii*, primary school teacher Gheorghe Martin from Avram Iancu (Arad County), who provided the following account:

"Later, when I came across Mr. Biciulescu's work *New Trends and Reforms in Western Schools*, which described the new trend of printing in schools, with its founder, C. Freinet, I decided to follow it.

In Aciua (my village), printing was out of the question for the time being, but with the help of the cooperative, it was possible to get a mimeograph!

Then, you should have seen the activity, the effort, the emulation, not for a medal, but for the joy of printing their own compositions, drawings, their own creations, not someone else's! How they trembled with excitement when they laid it down on paper! After a week, each one went home with "The Students' Magazine of A. Iancu", named by them: *Pure Thought*.

Thus, I saw my long-held dream realized, and after printing a few issues, I noticed something. The magazine, bearing the date: Spring, had drawings that matched the season: snowdrops, storks, violets, crocuses, etc. Compositions titled "Among the Nests", "Spring Work in the Orchard", "The Journal of Such-and-Such Day (After the Crocuses)", "Stephen the Great", etc., were all connected to Spring. Who could say they wanted this center of interest to be more perfectly accomplished? *Verba volant, scripta manent* (Words fly away, writings remain).

This wasn't at all what the old curriculum required of me, the correlation of subjects, but rather what today's new curriculum demands of me – a center of interest, which takes into account that we are not living on the moon, but right here, on this Earth, which takes on different aspects to which my soul reacts. Spring wasn't just outside, but also in the classroom, in our notebooks, in our heads, and even in the magazine. We were truly living it, no joke!

The method of centers of interest is promoted by the new curriculum, which, though lagging behind others, endorses the central tenets of all ultra-modern pedagogy, encouraging the child towards activity and spontaneity, and not placing obstacles in their way." (Martin, 1939, pp. 126-128)

The author praises Freinet's pedagogy, highlighting the positive impact of introducing printing into schools, even in an adapted form by using the mimeograph, on the students' activity and enthusiasm. Motivated by the opportunity to print their own compositions and drawings, the students displayed a unique joy and excitement, reflected in the creation of the school magazine. The timeless reference to the difficulties in acquiring the necessary classroom equipment, due to the lack of support from central authorities, is

something Freinet himself expresses resignation over in the mentioned work. The approach focused on the children's seasonal interests perfectly exemplifies the method of centers of interest, promoting activity, spontaneity, and connection with the surrounding reality, in contrast to the much more rigid Herbartian traditional curriculum. Thus, teacher Gh. Martin from the Arad area saw his dream realized and emphasized the superiority of this modern pedagogical method in cultivating a vibrant and relevant educational environment in the context of the education of those times.

#### **4. The Dalton Plan**

The Dalton Plan is an educational system developed by Helen Parkhurst in the 1910s (Gutek & Gutek, 2016), which was implemented at the Dalton School in Massachusetts, USA (Gutek & Gutek, 2020). This school system focused on learning through experience and encourages active student engagement in the learning process. A supporter of the Montessori method, instead of acting as an American surrogate of it, she turned her attention to developing and promoting her own idea of progressive education, creating a plan for a reorganized school – educational laboratories where students enjoyed greater freedom (Gutek & Gutek, 2020).

Parkhurst proposed an innovative approach to education, focusing on experiential learning and promoting an active approach for students in the learning process. In the Dalton system, students have more freedom to choose their learning activities and set their own learning goals, while they learn through practical work and activities relevant to real life. Teachers play the role of guides and counselors in the learning process, rather than simply being transmitters of information. She argued that students should learn through practical work and activities relevant to real life, instead of learning through memorization and reading. Her theory was based on the idea that students should learn through “real things”, “real people”, and “real problems”, rather than learning through traditional subjects like history, mathematics, or literature (Gutek, 2022).

The principles underlying this plan were: learning through experience (students learned through practical work, activities relevant to real life, and by

understanding the connection between theory and practice), learning through self-direction (students were encouraged to manage their own learning process, set their own learning goals, and evaluate their progress), and learning through projects (students work in teams on projects, understanding the relationship between school subjects and real life) (Semel, 2002).

Helen Parkhurst's early educational efforts garnered significant attention. Her book, *Education on the Dalton Plan* (1922), was published in 1922 and, within six months of its release, had been translated into 14 languages. The Dalton Plan was adopted by many schools and countries worldwide and had a major impact on modern education. The Dalton educational system was adapted to suit the specific needs of different cultures and countries, but the core principles of learning through experience, self-direction, and projects remained the same. In the 1920s and 1930s, she traveled to places such as England, Japan, Russia, China, Chile, Denmark, and Germany, where she was invited to give lectures on her educational philosophy (Semel, 2002). The Dalton Plan still had deficiencies, particularly the maintenance of a single program for all students and the reliance on a textbook-based teaching system. It can be said it represented a compromise between traditional schooling and new schooling, minimizing the role of the teacher and interpersonal relationships. Unlike Dewey or Montessori, who saw their educational experiments as based on and contributing to science (following the principles outlined by psychologist E. J. Swift; see Swift, 1908), Parkhurst was criticized for her overly pragmatic attitude, admitting that when she consulted a work and encountered an interesting idea, she did not read further (Luke, 1950, as cited in van der Ploeg, 2013a). However, apart from Dewey, no other American educator of the early 20th century enjoyed as much international influence, a fact evident in the interwar context of Romania (van der Ploeg, 2013b). In Romania, Helen Parkhurst was briefly mentioned by teacher C. Dogaru in the article "The Scandalmongers and the Teaching Profession [Clevetitorii și meseria de învățător]" (1936, p. 11) with her Dalton Plan, alongside Peter Petersen's Jena Plan, in the context of a discussion about the individualization of education: "These attempts are evidence of the efforts of cultured people from all countries to eliminate the sins of an old, soul-crushing school system and transform it, as the Americans aspire, into a paradise of childhood" (Dogaru, 1936, p. 11). The Dalton Plan was also mentioned in contemporary radio programs (Radio-fonia, 1934) and in

a description of an international congress by Magda Sp. Popescu, where the main subject was a visit to the École des Roches (see Demolins, 1898), but the discussion also expands to the ideal of providing children with as much independence as possible in the educational process: “Today we consider the child like a bush that only needs to be set on fire with a match to burn on its own. The Dalton Plan was adopted so that students would work as much as possible with their own minds” (Popescu, 1931, pp. 386–405).

A detailed and laudatory description of the Dalton Plan comes from Izabela Sadoveanu-Evan (1870-1941), in an issue of *Școala Vremii* from 1937:

“One way to harmonize active schooling with official schooling is the Dalton Plan, created by Helen Parkhurst, Director of Education at the University School for Children in New York. [...] The implementation involves dividing the curriculum into several parts, much like how we divide it in school, ensuring that each part is connected with the subjects taught, forming a unified whole. We determine this division in a conference with the teachers and create connections between the subjects chosen as study centers so that the material is presented as dominated by a single idea and linked together as a whole. For example, if the topic is the History of Romania, Geography should be studied simultaneously. Generally, each child receives the same material to work on. The material must be presented in the form of clearly defined problems and expressed in a notebook called the child’s book. Each class is entrusted to a teacher in primary school, and several specialists in secondary school. [...] The teacher is given fifty minutes each day to discuss with each child the organization of their work and time. Each child’s understanding is reviewed, criticism is given, and advice is offered regarding the work they need to do that day. The child’s work is examined not only on a single subject but on the material as a whole—what they have worked on, how much they have worked, and how they have worked. In large schools, there are specific workrooms called laboratories where children go to work after the conference hour. Most often, children gather in groups to work together, and various corners are arranged for isolating the groups and working together. What is interesting is how children discuss among themselves, how they divide the work and consult each other, the discipline that naturally arises from the freedom to move from one to another, and how disputes and antisocial habits gradually disappear.

Each child records daily on a card how many units they have worked on and builds a graphic representation of their work progress. This way, the number of units worked on any subject is known, allowing the teacher to allocate the remaining material according to each child's capacity and ability. Often, children change their work plan from one day to the next. In their work, they assess their strengths, learning to evaluate their work accurately. Even the aversion to certain subjects disappears, as they see where they are weak and understand that they cannot progress until they overcome their weaknesses by appropriately distributing their time. Before finishing the work session, the children gather around the teacher to discuss different parts of the program they have worked on. Each child who has undertaken a part of the material through what is called a contract or assignment has common interests, and the work is discussed collectively in what is called a "Conference," with each child bringing something new and viewing the subject from different perspectives. Every day, a different subject is addressed and discussed with a different section that has completed the material up to that day, in the same number of units. Then, each morning, there is a lesson hour with the teacher, either with the whole class or with a group, depending on how the material was worked on, and these hours signify progress for the children in assimilating the material, with each child being aware that they have given their best and reached the highest level of their personal development. No textbooks are used; instead, libraries and all kinds of maps, laboratory instruments, museums, and magazine collections are used to obtain illustrations and various information about the subjects covered. How well it could be applied here as well!" (pp. 16–18).

In the article, Izabela Sadoveanu-Evan highlighted the advantages of the Dalton Plan by emphasizing the flexibility and individualization of education, as well as the effective integration of the curriculum. Sadoveanu explained how the Dalton Plan, developed by Helen Parkhurst, allowed for the division of the curriculum into interconnected units, facilitating a holistic approach to subjects. Teachers could collaborate to organize these units around central ideas, ensuring coherence and continuity in learning. Each day, teachers discussed individually with students, offering personalized guidance – what is now called "feedback" – adjusting according to each student's progress. According to Sadoveanu-Evan, this system promoted self-assessment and

self-regulation among students, reducing resistance to certain subjects and improving discipline and cooperation within groups. The laboratories and diverse resources, such as libraries and museums, could replace traditional textbooks, thus stimulating students' interest and active engagement. Izabela Sadoveanu-Evan suggested at that time that implementing this model in Romanian schools could bring significant benefits, contributing to the development of students' personalities and individual competencies. However, in the previously mentioned article on "School Work Communities", the Dalton Plan is criticized precisely for granting too much freedom:

"The prototype of exaggerated individualism in pedagogy is represented by the Dalton system of Mrs. Helen Parkhurst (America), where the teacher no longer delivers lessons but instead supervises how students complete their individual or occasionally assisted 'homework'. In this system, the teacher no longer prescribes or dictates how schoolwork should be carried out but rather is consulted only when students need it.

The Dalton system may have enthused advocates of absolute freedom for students, but impartial observers could see that some form of disguised leadership is still necessary. The more disguised it is, the more skill – if not innate talent – and greater attention from the teacher are required. Furthermore, collaboration among students or between students and teachers was found not to be incidental but, on the contrary, both necessary and natural. It is necessary to keep students at a level and within a framework of concerns that make such collaboration – albeit occasional – possible; and it is natural because it is inherent for people to live, work, and develop in groups." (Stoian, 1939, pp. 83–87)

Thus, in interwar Romania a difference of opinion arose between educators who supported the idea of a "school community" (see Popescu-Teiușan, 1940) and those who emphasized the individuality of the child. The Dalton Plan was criticized for its exaggerated individualism (for a more recent discussion see Borbély, 2014, pp. 265–274), where the teacher's role, according to the author, was limited to occasional supervision and consultation, overlooking the need for subtle leadership and structured collaboration between students and teachers to maintain an appropriate level of focus and learning.



## 5. Conclusions

As we have seen in this article, innovation in education is a complex process, linked to other types of processes and complex conceptual fields. These include development, change, reform, refinement, and innovation itself, which become important in this domain because education must free itself from uniformity. Sociological perspectives and psychological analysis intersect and influence each other here, with the spirit of a civilization progressively inspiring research in the humanities. The relationship between education and development is significant in this context; education is not viewed merely as a simple social transmitter of social roles but also as an important factor in driving social development (Towne et al., 2005, p. 78).

In the relationship between innovation and reform, innovation represents a change in the structure and effectiveness of practices within the education system, while reform is the framework responsible for integrating innovation into education with the aim of improving its performance (Towne et al., 2005, p. 79).

Change has recently begun to be seen as something positive and entirely remarkable, preferred over continuity. However, we cannot deny an evident reality: throughout the history of education, innovations have been present in all periods and with all personalities, starting with founders like Pestalozzi and Maria Montessori, and continuing with Dewey, Freinet, and others who were also prominent innovators. Yet, in education, we observe that ideas, customs, and structures change very slowly. There is a characteristic, vividly highlighted by history, that education is a field with no clear break between the new and the old. This process of assimilation, of adapting previous structures to new practices, techniques, and ideas, is inherently slow and evolves gradually. In pre-war and interwar Romania, we saw how the ideas of Herbart, Parkhurst, and Freinet produced effects and served as the basis for lively intellectual dialogues. This discussion about pedagogical doctrines reaches its peak in the period between the two world wars.

Parkhurst's Dalton Plan proposed a more flexible and individualized approach to education. It aimed to create a learning environment where students could work at their own pace and take responsibility for their own learning. This

model encouraged independent thinking and self-directed learning, moving away from the rigid, one-size-fits-all approach of traditional education. In the section dedicated to this pedagogy, we saw how, in the Romanian context, Helen Parkhurst was positively received by activist Izabela Sadoveanu-Evan but also faced criticism.

Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf pedagogy promoted a holistic approach to education, addressing the intellectual, emotional, and physical development of the child. It emphasized the importance of imagination and creativity in learning, integrating the arts, crafts, music, and movement into the curriculum. Steiner believed in educating the whole child, including their spiritual and moral development, fostering a sense of social responsibility and connection with the world. Unfortunately, in the interwar Romanian intellectual environment, Rudolf Steiner was known more for his advocacy of anthroposophy, according to the evidence presented.

Célestin Freinet's pedagogy emphasized cooperation, free expression, and learning through practical activities and direct experiences. The Freinet method included the use of school print shops, inter-school correspondence, and community projects. Freinet promoted the idea that students learn best in a collaborative environment where they can actively contribute to the learning process and develop practical and social skills. This approach was practically applied in the interwar period in Arad County, Romania, as deduced from some contemporary press testimonies. However, the theoretical contributions and influence of this alternative were less significant compared to those of Dewey, Parkhurst, or Montessori.

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