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THE RELATION “SCHOOL-THEATRE” IN THE METHODOLOGICAL HERITAGE OF NEDELCHO BENEV

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ABSTRACT

The pedagogical experience of Nedelcho Benev is presented in this article. Nedelcho Benev made experiments with stage adaptations and with writing stage adapted reading materials in primary school. He was a follower of free upbringing and considered school a pedagogical laboratory in which he put the ideas of aesthetic enrichment and self-enrichment for the free reign of children's imagination into practice.

Key words: school-theatre, methodology of training, history of Bulgarian education

INTRODUCTION

In the 1920s and 1930s the ideas of free upbringing stimulated Bulgarian teachers to look for new means for pedagogical practice enrichment.

In the triad literature-theatre-school Nedelcho Benev could see a good opportunity for improving the methodological tools of Bulgarian language and literature teachers in primary school – according to his ideas, he had to make his students worship the theatre by creating his own dramatic writings and creative work with stage adapted readings.

PRESENTATION

About the writer and the pedagogical experimenter

Nedelcho Benev (1887-1971) was born in the village of Ivankovtsy, Gabrovo region. He was a graduate of the Teacher Training Institute in Russe. His gift for writing manifested itself in his early school years but it was not until the period of the Balkan Wars (1912-1918), in which he took part as a non-commissioned officer, that his talent developed to its full power. His artistic heritage includes:

- children's drama works: “To the Sun” (1923), “For Alive Water” (1924), “The Secret Key” (1925), “Mother Stepmother” (1926), “The Little Rescuers” (1927), “Town or Village” (1934), “The Best Friends” (1932), “Struggle for Faith” (1940);

- short stories: “Lonely Silhouettes” (tales and short stories, 1914), “Years of War” (1940);
- poems: “My Songs” (1933), “With Glasses to the Moon” (poems and sketches, 1938);
- short novels: “War and Love” (1930);
- a collection of articles: “A Look Around” (1942), dedicated to writer Ilia Ivanov-Cheren, etc [3, 4].

Being a connoisseur of his works, Dimitar Dobrev claimed: “Because of the true reflection of a child's soul, the plays found a good reception. Also because of the true reflection of reality, the author was taken to court – a wealthy man from Gabrovo had seen some of his own personal characteristics in one of Benev's plays.” [2, p. 513]. Hearing about the court case against Nedelcho Benev, the Tolstoyist newspaper “Svoboda” sympathized with him and supported him within a membership. He maintained relations with the Tolstoyists and vegetarians through the Temperance societies and the League for New Upbringing. He actively co-operated with the Tolstoyist newspapers “Revival” and “Free Upbringing”.

Nedelcho Benev became one of the founders of the Union of Provincial Writers.

At the same time, he was a longtime member of the management of the “Aprilov-Palauzov” Folk Community Center and together with librarian Petar Stoev he collected books, newspapers and magazines published by citizens of Gabrovo, thus creating the first Gabrovo archive. It was his idea to organize a community centre amateur drama theatre. An enthusiastic actor, chairman of Gabrovo Municipality Theatre, Benev, together with other amateurs, kindled the spark of theatrical art. He contributed

to the community centre newspaper "Izvestia" (News) with poems, stories, articles, and edited certain issues.

A pedagogue with 33 years of experience and a high school director, he shared his experience in the "Live Linguistics" teacher's guide (1928). Its republishing in 1939 was under the subtitle "Theory and practice in grammar, reading, composition and children's theatre" [1]. Some of his articles in the magazines "Free Upbringing" and "Pedagogical Practice" logically continued the same thematic problems.

Nedelcho Benev and the Children's theatre

In the book "Live Linguistics", recalling the historical development of the theatre in Bulgaria since the Revival period, the author talked about the good traditions of joint participation of students and teachers in amateur performances.

In this context he set the requirements for each school to have a theatre and a stage where public performances for students and parents should be organized. In the performances the author did see just ordinary entertainment. They were, in his opinion, an organic continuation of the education in all fields of linguistics. "Here the younger people will hear the magic power of human speech, depicted in the verbal images of verses, tales or dialogues and elder people will realize the construction and the forms of various literary genres." [1, p.25].

He analyzed two productive ways to satisfy the aesthetic needs of students:

- children's operetta - it combines musical and dramatic elements; this unity is not always achieved - good music is usually combined with elementary storyline, and a dramatic message is rendered meaninglessly by a superficial musical motif. The author dreamed of an original children's operetta, without imitation of foreign works and close to folklore songs;

- children's drama – an artistic and complete work that represents man and the humane; the struggle between good and evil; the pursuit of moral purity. Students are the performers and the teacher should be the director. He characterized the actors and insisted that every participant should consider whether they were able to enter the character of the hero; he gave advice for the voice and the stage behaviour; he performed staging and rehearsals and chose a suitable prompter; he worked for the scenery, sound, make-up, clothing supply, etc.

Nedelcho Benev's contribution to theatrical didactics is in two directions: he gave the algorithm of the first attempts of writing dramatic works and student amateur activity for adapting classical texts for screenplays of theatrical plays presented on school stages.

1. Dramatic composition

1.1. First lesson – comments on an amateur play already seen – contents, characters, and way of writing. For this purpose the text is given and the students learn what an act means – the event happens at a certain time and on a certain place, without interruption; in more acts time and place are changed. The following is explained in an easy way:

- the list of actors – gives the number of the characters who have lines in the play; the presence of indirect speech at the beginning of the drama – it contains directions for the scenery; the lines in the brackets are not actors' lines but those of the author;

- the nature of the action - it must be organized in such a way as not to allow the scene to remain empty;

- giving assignments – to read plays taken from the school library at home [1, p. 57-59].

1.2. Second lesson – learning the skill to create a dramatic composition that includes:

- choosing an event – to provoke, to be entertaining in order to become the basis of the dramatic action;

- choosing the participants in the event – physical and speech characteristics; what part has been given to them – main or secondary;

- comments on the title – to reflect the theme of what is happening;

- moral for the spectator.

1.3. Third lesson – creating a dramatic composition; this process goes through the following stages:

- revision of the material already mastered;

- choosing an event which has to meet certain requirements in order to be the plot of the dramatic action

- specifying the time and place of the action;

- description of the actors - age, kinship, clothing;

- spelling and punctuation requirements - at the beginning of each line the name of the acting person is recorded, followed by a point and the lines they pronounce.

The accompanying activities are specified in brackets;

- writing own dramatic works;

- reading in front of the class and joint review
- everyone has the right to give opinion on the choice of the title, characters, their behaviour and their lines, can the writing be used as a moral and whom it is directed to.

“Thus the students could become so keen on this new type of composition for them that they could be willing to write only “dramas”, even to present them on stage. This shows that drama as a verbal expression of personal experience is very close to the active nature of children and they easily get attached to it,” Nedelcho Benev claimed [1, p. 63].

2. Dramatized readings - within two lessons, students turn works by famous writers into stage adaptations.

2.1. First lesson – introducing the author and the work. The work is read and divided into episodes according to the place of action. The teacher assigns a task asking the students to retell orally the separate episodes to see if they have understood the plot of the story. The moral is sought on purpose – what the author wants to suggest to the readers. A character sketch of the characters is made.

2.2. Second lesson – before the written work the following activities are carried out:

– specifying the situation and actors; revising how indirect speech is turned into direct speech;
- reminding the rules of drama writing, studied during the lessons of drama composition – and the difference here is that the base is not a text, personally created, but a work of a famous writer;

- written composition – dramatization of the work [1, p. 65-70].

CONCLUSION

The ideas of Nedelcho Benev concerning the relation between school and theatre have more practical than theoretical character and their addressees are students and primary school teachers. Thus he supported his pragmatic views about the relation between education and art which correspond to the ideas of the League for New Upbringing. This associates him with the quests of Ilia Enchev who, however, in spite of the written and successfully presented author’s plays, tends to be more theoretically inclined as far as school and drama education is concerned.

The name of Nedelcho Benev, with his methodical contribution for the enrichment of theatrical knowledge and the development of drama skills by means of linguistic literary education, can be ranked next to the name of Konstantine Sagaev, who adapted the European experience of theatrical didactics to the Bulgarian conditions in the 1920s and 1930s.

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