

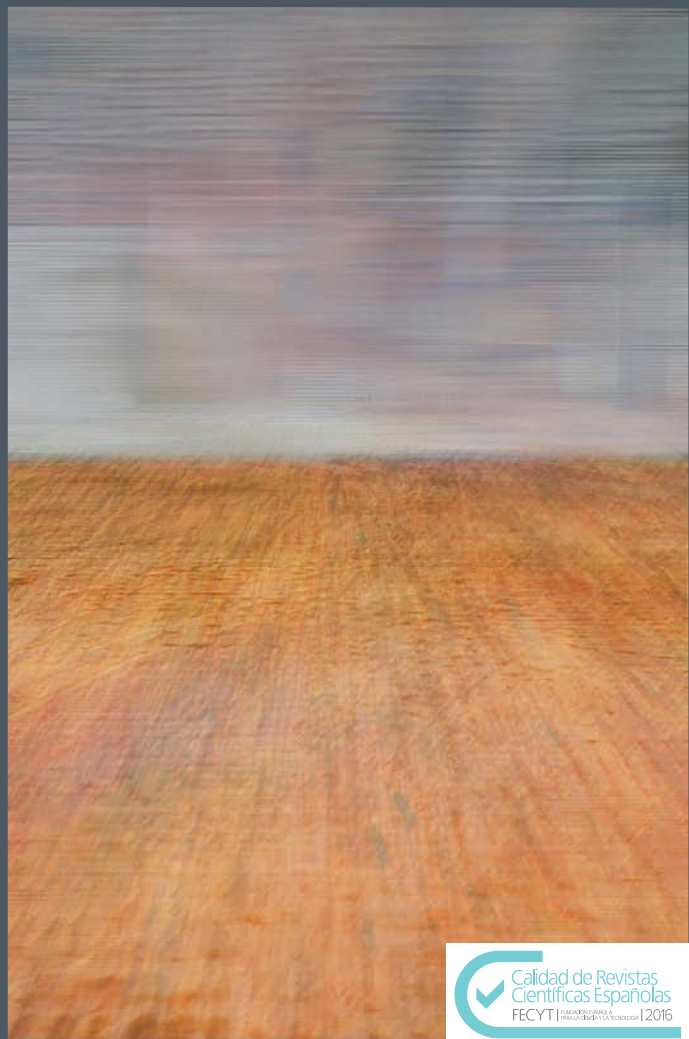
revista de  
**e**EDUCACIÓN  
Nº 377 JULIO-SEPTIEMBRE 2017



**El Plan Dalton en España: Recepción y Apropiación (1920-1939)**

**The Dalton Plan in Spain: Reception and Appropriation (1920-1939)**

María del Mar Del Pozo Andrés  
Sjaak Braster



# The Dalton Plan in Spain: Reception and Appropriation (1920-1939)<sup>1</sup>

## El Plan Dalton en España: Recepción y Apropiación (1920-1939)

DOI: 10.4438/1988-592X-RE-2017-377-355

María del Mar Del Pozo Andrés

*Universidad de Alcalá*

Sjaak Braster

*Erasmus University of Rotterdam*

### Abstract

**Introduction.** All the methodologies developed by the Progressive Education movement followed a comparable process of reception and appropriation in Spain. This process began with visits abroad by «pedagogical explorers», sponsored for the most part by the *Junta para Ampliación de Estudios* (Board for Advanced Studies) and concluded with the practical experiences performed by the Spanish schoolteachers in their schools. This paper explores how the Dalton Plan perfectly matches the model constructed for explaining other innovative methodologies, but also tries to understand the reasons of its little success amongst the teachers. **Methodology.** All the steps of the historical method have been followed: research and review of manuscript, bibliographical, hemerographical and iconographical sources, comparison between countries and critical analysis of the documentation that was used. **Results.** In this article we begin by showing the considerable impact that the Dalton Plan had countries such as Great Britain, that were in search of a good alternative for the

---

<sup>(1)</sup> This work forms part of the project «Educational Progressivism and School Tradition in Spain through Photography (1900–1970)» [EDU2014-52498-C2-1-P], funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness within the framework of the National R&D and Innovation Plan.

homogeneous grouping of students, the so-called «class system». This enthusiastic climate in those countries was experienced by several Spanish pedagogues that nevertheless could not understand it. We also analyse the translation to Spanish of several books and articles about the Dalton Plan, and how many of these translations transformed the meaning of the original works. The oeuvres of some Spanish pedagogues divulged false *clichés* about its possibilities of application in the Spanish schools. The direct consequence was that the Dalton Plan was far less known in Spain than other innovations of the Progressive Education movement, although we discuss some of the experiences done and never documented till now. Conclusions. The article attempts to explain the failure of the Dalton Plan within the Spanish pedagogical context, which still still favoured the class system; and, within the ideological context of the Second Republic, sympathized with more socialized methods, such as the Project Method.

*Key Words:* Progressive Education, Dalton Plan, Spain, Theories of Reception, Individualized teaching.

### Resumen

Introducción. Todas las metodologías desarrolladas por el movimiento de la Escuela Nueva siguieron un proceso similar de recepción y apropiación en España, que comenzó con los viajes al extranjero de los «exploradores pedagógicos», becados generalmente por la Junta para Ampliación de Estudios, y culminó con las experiencias prácticas realizadas por los maestros españoles en sus escuelas. Este artículo explica cómo el Plan Dalton se ajusta perfectamente al modelo de recepción descrito para otras metodologías innovadoras pero también intenta comprender las razones de su escaso éxito entre los docentes. Metodología. Se han seguido las fases propias del método histórico: búsqueda y revisión de fuentes manuscritas, bibliográficas, hemerográficas e iconográficas, la comparación entre países y el análisis crítico de la documentación manejada. Resultados. Presentamos el gran impacto que el Plan Dalton tuvo en aquellos países, como Gran Bretaña, en los que se estaba buscando una alternativa al sistema de clases homogéneas representado por la escuela graduada. Este ambiente de entusiasmo fue vivido «in situ» por varios pedagogos españoles que, sin embargo, no supieron comprenderlo. Se analizan las traducciones al castellano que se hicieron de los libros y artículos sobre el Plan Dalton, y cómo muchas de estas traducciones transformaron el significado de las obras originales. Los trabajos de pedagogos españoles difundieron *clichés* falsos sobre sus posibilidades de aplicación en las escuelas de nuestro país. La consecuencia es que el Plan Dalton fue mucho menos conocido en España que otras innovaciones de la Escuela Nueva, si bien aportamos algunos de los ensayos realizados y nunca documentados hasta ahora. Conclusiones. El artículo intenta explicar el fracaso de esta innovación metodológica en un contexto pedagógico como el español, aún muy favorable a la escuela graduada, y en el contexto ideológico de la Segunda República, que simpatizó con otros métodos más socializadores, como el de proyectos.

*Palabras clave:* Escuela Nueva, Plan Dalton, España, Teorías de la Recepción, Enseñanza Individualizada.

## **A model of the reception in Spain of the Progressive Education movement**

While the pedagogical movement known as the Progressive Education has been known and studied universally for some time, the last few years have seen the emergence of important theoretical and historiographical advances, opening new lines and tendencies in research. One example is the way that the theory of reception can be applied to the transnational spread of pedagogical theories, while a second example can be found in the explanation of how we may describe, based on the method of cultural transfer, the appropriation and reinterpretation of foreign cultural references in a national context. (Bruno-Jofré & Schriewer, 2012; Espagne, 2013; Bagchi, Fuchs & Rousmaniere, 2014).

The historiography of education has traditionally silenced virtually all information regarding the presence or influence of the Progressive Education movement in Spain, and notwithstanding an occasional passing reference to Catalonia, one could almost conclude that this movement never took hold in Spain. Recent educational historiography, however, has shown an increasing interest in the study of the Spanish ramifications of the Progressive Education (Pozo, 2014). In fact, research has shown that the movement was known in Spain starting with its very inception, and that many of its pedagogical theories and practical applications could be found here earlier than in other European countries. There is even evidence that as early as 1898 – the year of the first ideas attributed to the Progressive Education – Spain saw the unprecedented phenomenon of a simultaneous emergence/reception of tendencies; in the briefest of time, the birth and development of new ideas gave way to their divulgation in Spanish pedagogical culture.

Two defining features of the Spanish version of the Progressive Education movement are its de-structuring and its multi-directionality (Pozo, 2005). This makes it possible to trace the origin of each theoretical

or pedagogical proposal, from its initial appearance and evaluation in pedagogical culture to its application in school culture. In general, the ideas and approaches of the Progressive Education were received in Spain in accordance with a model similar to that which can be observed with methods like the one of Decroly and the Project method (Pozo, 2007 and 2009) and which is characterized by the following stages (though not necessarily in this order):

- *Observation* of the practice of the new ideas and methods in foreign schools. This was done by what we could call «pedagogical explorers»: primary and secondary school teachers, inspectors and teachers from the Teacher Training College who travelled to Europe between 1907 and 1936 and were funded by the *Junta para Ampliación de Estudios* (JAE). Although their role as «scouts» and importers to Spain of innovative teaching approaches is fairly well documented in contemporary historiography, there is one aspect of their work that tends to be overlooked, namely, the fact that these pedagogues never divulged their pedagogical discoveries until these ideas had been fully recognized and accredited by the international organisms of the Progressive Education.
- *Translation* of the «classic» works of the movement, which included those of the theorists as well as authors of specific methods. These were considered the works of high-brow pedagogical culture, published in books or in specialized journals, and their affordability allowed teachers a direct contact – free of intermediaries – with the ideas of the different pedagogues. Many of these texts were published in instalments in order to reduce the number of pages and to make them available to a greater number of teachers. For a variety of reasons, the translations of these texts tended to be rather free; in some cases, it was an attempt to make them more accessible to the readers, at other times there was a wish to drive home a certain ideological message, and in some instances, it was simply due the fact that the translators had only a limited knowledge of the original language.
- *Interpretation* of the author's ideas or methodological proposals in the form of a new work, nearly always written by the translator of the original pedagogue. These tended to be summaries, laying out in a fashion none too original the author's basic ideas, along with

practical suggestions on how to apply them in the context of the Spanish schools. These books ultimately served to strengthen the role of the translators as creators of public opinion, which could be favourable or critical depending on how attractive they design the activities for being applied by the teachers in their schools.

- *Adaptation* of the concepts or of the application of the method, i.e., the explanations offered – vocally, for the most part –, in the Teacher Training Colleges, in the teacher training courses or in articles. The articles were practically always written by teachers and they typically appeared in professional journals such as *El Magisterio Español*, as well as in comparable local and provincial publications. As a whole, these texts offered a markedly simplified, accessible account of the original ideas, reducing them in many cases to pedagogical formulas bearing little relation to the original ideas.
- *Appropriation* of the ideas received by the teachers, at which point these ideas became elements of a shared, popular pedagogical culture. By 1936 virtually all teachers were familiar with the ideas of the Progressive Education and had a fluent if somewhat simplified comprehension of some of its basic concepts – concepts which ended up conforming a sort of stereotype of the movement. Whether or not the teachers identified with the new tendencies enough to permanently change their teaching practices is hard to know, although recent research has identified a continuity in pedagogical discourse and in the influence of the Progressive Education during and after the Civil War (Pozo & Rabazas, 2013; Viñao, 2015; Barceló, Comas & Sureda, 2016).

In this article we analyse the process by which the Dalton Plan was introduced into Spanish school culture. We pose the following research questions:

- 1.- What role did «pedagogical explorers» play in the discovery of the method?
- 2.- Is the model of reception described above valid for explaining the expansion of the Dalton Plan in Spain?
- 3.- Why did the Dalton Plan prove to be less popular in Spain than other Progressive Education methods?

## Construction of the Dalton Plan as a Progressive Education method

Pedagogical literature identifies the creation of new methods as a central element in the discourse of the Progressive Education. These methods, which can be seen as a necessary invention for fostering principles of freedom, individuality and creativity, were important in enabling changes to be made on a large scale. They allowed for the integration of new ideas – often developed and carried out in private schools and in isolation – into the public and national educational system. Not surprisingly, the methods that have come down to textbooks of history of education are not the first or the only methods whose principles can be found in myriad, similar practices; the recognition and durability of these methods was due to the accreditation obtained from the networks of educators associated with the Progressive Education, and especially with the *New Education Fellowship*.

Any student of pedagogy is bound to have at least a superficial knowledge of the Dalton Plan. Textbooks typically describe it as a system of individualised education, designed by the educator Helen Parkhurst and implemented for the first time in 1920 in the High School of Dalton, Massachusetts. Among the features that characterize the method, the following stand out: the reconversion of the classroom into a specialized laboratory for each subject; the transformation of lessons and subject matter into activities that each student undertakes individually and at his or her own pace; the encouragement of personal responsibility through the use of contracts signed by the students in which they commit themselves to completing specified tasks in a given time frame; the elaboration of a system of charts and tests for gauging individual and group progress. Like all methodologies that have their roots in the Progressive Education, the Dalton Plan featured specific iconographic elements that made it recognizable around the world and differentiated it from other methods. Its distinctive «trademarks» are: the presence of a library in the classroom with a student nearby; students carrying out individual activities and handling teaching material; the teacher shown in a position that is neither central nor dominant; and finally, the act of writing portrayed as the central activity of the didactic process (Photograph 1).

The idealised image that Helen Parkhurst cultivated of herself begins with her trying out a version of the Dalton Plan as part of her first

teaching job at a one-room school in Wisconsin in 1904, when she was only eighteen. Over the following decade, during which she taught in a number of other schools, Parkhurst put together a teaching method that she herself described as «revolutionary» and «sensational», one that she claimed was absolutely original and not based on any existing pedagogical tradition. However, individualised teaching had been around since at least the late 1800s in the United States, where it was seen as the most up-to-date alternative to the uniform class system, which was already being regarded as obsolete. Experiments with new approaches, which were invariably labelled «plans» and given the name of the towns where they were first tried, included the Pueblo Plan and the Batavia Plan, to name two of the most well-known (Ploeg, 2013). We can be certain, therefore, that the Dalton Plan was neither unique nor was it innovative at its time, but rather it followed in a tradition that was already firmly rooted in the school culture of the United States.

---

PHOTOGRAPH I. Dalton School for Girls, The Hague, 1921-1930

---



Source: <http://haagsescholen.nl/klassenfotos/81dc7d2c-4248-11e4-bd86-63edc8502247>



Helen Parkhurst's success can only be understood in light of her connection to Maria Montessori. In 1914 she attended Montessori's international course in Rome and subsequently went on to become the preeminent proponent of the method in the United States from 1915 until 1918. She then distanced herself from the Italian pedagogue and at the end of 1919 began to experiment with her own, as yet unnamed ideas. From February through June, 1920, an «original plan» that she had designed was applied in the High School of Dalton, Massachusetts, not by herself but by the school's principal, Ernest Jackman. Jackman provided a thorough written account of the plan's application, in particular the parts of the method that did not prove adaptable or simply failed (Jackman, 1920). Curiously, before American educators had even got wind of this experiment, it was known in Great Britain. This was thanks to the efforts of Belle Rennie, a former secretary of the Montessori Society, who in 1920 led a team of British teachers to Dalton to observe the experiment and to visit Helen Parkhurst in New York. These pedagogues knew exactly what they were looking for, as the British educators were on a quest for an individualised teaching method that would serve as a continuation of the Montessori method, i.e., one for high school students (Ploeg, 2014). Such an initiative, which had been rejected flat out by Maria Montessori in a visit to London the previous year, was presumably what Helen Parkhurst had in mind; she merely identified and addressed a methodological need that had arisen in British school culture at the time.

Upon her return from the United States, Belle Rennie wrote two articles about Parkhurst's experiments that appeared in *The Times Educational Supplement* in May, 1920. The name 'Dalton Plan' had not yet been adopted, and the method was referred to as the laboratory method. Although scant information was offered in the articles, it was enough to incite a flurry of responses in the British press. Most of the commentaries coincided in pointing out that the method described had been in use for years in the U.K; some teachers signalled as far back as 1884 (Lee, 2000), although the method that seemed most closely aligned with that of Parkhurst seems to have been a plan developed by John Eades in a primary school in Leeds. Known as the Kirkstall Road Demonstration School, Eades' plan had first been implemented in 1907. Across the U.K. new experiments flourished; in November, 1920 the British press announced that the method now known officially as the

Dalton Plan had been implemented in several schools, some with over 600 students. One of these schools, Bedales, had introduced the method as a more flexible alternative to Montessori's rather dogmatic methodology (Brooks, 1998). However, the first school to apply the method was the County Secondary School for Girls in Streatham, whose principal, Rosa Bassett, had already implemented her own very free and personal version of the Dalton Plan in June and September of 1920. The following year Bassett opened the doors of her school to visitors for three days, from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 1921, and more than 2,000 educators took advantage of the occasion to come and witness first-hand just how this school had been «daltonised».

By the summer of 1921, Great Britain's interest in the Dalton Plan had grown into a furour, spurred at least in part by Helen Parkhurst's first visit to the U.K. and by the collection of her articles that was published in the *Times Educational Supplement*. The essays appeared in July and August and constituted the first systematic description of the method. During this visit, Parkhurst also sponsored the creation of the British Dalton Association, an initiative undertaken by a large contingent of former Montessorians. The association, officially constituted in October, was in charge of evaluating and accrediting the Dalton Plan's application in the many schools adopting it; some estimated the number of these schools in the hundreds, others in the thousands. With the publication of the book *Education on the Dalton Plan* (Parkhurst, 1922), the method reached the peak of its popularity, which towards the end of the 1920s would begin to wane. Although Helen Parkhurst figures as the sole author, the work includes chapters by Rosa Bassett and John Eades, an apparent acknowledgement of their contribution to the construction of the method.

So swiftly did British teachers appropriate her method that not even Helen Parkhurst was able to determine whether the classroom practices being applied under the rubric of the Dalton Plan really were the Dalton Plan. No real, consensual agreement had been reached as to what the Dalton Plan actually meant, resulting in its reduction to a vague notion of individualised teaching (Lager, 1983). With regard to its diffusion in other countries, Parkhurst's work and writings were far less influential in popularising the method in Europe than those of Albert John Lynch. Lynch was the principal of the West Green School in Tottenham, London, a primary school of the public education system that used the Dalton

Plan from April 1921 until 1932. Lynch's and Parkhurst's Dalton Plans actually had little in common beyond their defence of «individual work».

### **Spanish «pedagogical explorers» and their perception of the Dalton Plan**

Between 1920 and 1922, when the Dalton Plan was taking Great Britain by storm, a large contingent of Spanish pedagogues was residing there, most of them under the auspices of the JAE. This group included renowned educators such as Miguel Catalán, Margarita Comas, Rubén Landa, Lorenzo Luzuriaga, Margarita Mayo, María del Pilar Oñate and Fernando Sáinz. With the exception of Margarita Comas, not one of these pedagogues mentioned the Dalton Plan, despite the fact that several of them, due to the subjects they were investigating, actually visited secondary schools where the plan had been implemented. Perhaps the most puzzling case is that of Fernando Sáinz Ruiz, primary school inspector from Granada, who had compiled and translated practically all available published work on the Dalton Plan. Sáinz travelled to London in June, 1921, the best possible moment for witnessing the methodological revolution that was taking place, and yet there is not a word about the phenomenon in any of his letters, his memoirs or in the personal observations included in the books and articles that he wrote about the Dalton Plan.

Margarita Comas Camps travelled to London on 16 October, 1920 to study Science Methodology. She visited a school run by Rosa Bassett, the *County Secondary School for Girls* – this was likely in March of 1921 –, and in her diaries she gives us the first known account of the Dalton Plan. Although Comas was not even aware of the plan's name, she did know that it had originated in the United States and she quickly recognized the influence of Montessori and Tolstoy. For two mornings she observed the students on her own, with no one to guide her or explain the method to her, resulting in observations that are highly personal and «uncontaminated». Comas describes the experience as one of «free work»; two days of the week there was no actual «class», but the children were expected to work at certain times of the day. As they could choose what subject to work on and where to work on it, they seemed motivated. The teacher only explained certain, specific aspects of the student's work and advised them about what books to consult from the library, which was

located in the hall. Comas understood perfectly well that the object of the method, to get each student to advance at her own pace, was meant to be an alternative to the conventional, tedious and ineffectual class given to the «average» level of the group. She herself calls attention to «the fallacy of the *average pupil*, as professor Adams says» (Comas, 1921, p. 53). Comas failed however, to pick up on the idea of the work contracts or of the individual tasks; she simply observed how each month the girls were given a list of topics for each subject, «and they have to complete it; they're given a written exercise to check the results». Naturally, she observed the way in which the girls worked alone and each in their own way.

Of all the Spanish educators, the one who showed the greatest interest in the Dalton Plan was Marcelo Agudo Garat, a public school teacher in Falcones-Romana (Alicante) and in Valldemossa (Balears). With a grant from the JAE, Agudo visited England in 1926 and in 1928, after having obtained from the *New Education Fellowship* a long list of centres where the Dalton Plan was purportedly being used. To his surprise, most of these schools no longer worked with the plan. His report from 1928 on the West Green School in Tottenham, run by Lynch, is especially noteworthy. We know that Agudo spent five days at the school and that he seems to have been the only Spanish pedagogue to have heard about the plan directly from Lynch, yet his description of the plan's features is based on one provided in a book that had recently been published by Fernando Sáinz (1928). Agudo's personal comments focus on identifying the «deviations» occurring in the way the school applied the Dalton Plan as compared to the model described in Sáinz's book, and Agudo attributes these differences to the «elasticity» with which Lynch approached the method (Agudo, 1928a). Agudo also visited the County Secondary School for Girls, one of the first schools to have implemented the Dalton Plan, and here too he noted numerous modifications to the original method; voluntary tasks were only permitted after the completion of all obligatory work stipulated in a program; only two of the eight daily periods were allotted for «free work»; and many of the subjects taught had not been «daltonised» (Agudo, 1928b).

## Translation, Interpretation and Adaptation of the Dalton Plan in the Spanish pedagogical context

The first mention of the Dalton Plan in Spain can be found in early 1923 in the Catalanian publication *Butlletí del Mestres*, in a lengthy review of an article that had appeared in the *Times Educational Supplement* (Monés, 2011). In March and April of 1923 the first article devoted entirely to the method in Spain was published in the *Revista de Pedagogía*. The novelty lay in the fact that the article was not signed by Helen Parkhurst but rather by Fernando Sáinz Ruiz, who made it clear that the essay was essentially a summary of the book published in English by the author (Parkhurst, 1922). The timing was significant, as it was also in March, 1923 that the first news about the Dalton Plan appeared in French educational journals and that the program of the 2<sup>nd</sup> congress of the New Education Fellowship was announced; in this congress, which was to be held in August of the same year in Montreux-Territet, John Eades was scheduled to give a paper on the Dalton Plan. We can see, therefore, that the method began to be divulged in Spain at precisely the same time that it was gaining its international accreditation as the latest Progressive Education method.

There are a number of peculiarities in Fernando Sáinz's article that are worth pointing out. One is the manner in which he extols Parkhurst's supreme knowledge «of the modern trends in education» (Sáinz, 1923, p. 92); while he cites Montessori, Dewey, Decroly and Kerschensteiner, Parkhurst herself only mentions the first two, and it is doubtful that she would have read other European pedagogues of the time. This, together with his allusion to the recently created *Dalton Association* in London, also unmentioned by Parkhurst, can be seen as a personal contribution on Sáinz's part, his way of promoting the consolidation of the method within the network of Progressive Education innovations.

Another of the questions brought up by Sáinz was considerably more complicated, as it has to do with the class system, which Parkhurst took such strong issue with in her book. This model, known in Spain as «graded teaching», was viewed as a modernising approach that still had far to go before being viable in this country. In the U.K., on the other hand, the pedagogical establishment had begun to criticise it and was looking for a more individualised system with which to supplant it. Conveying this dynamic in just a few lines was a daunting task, and Fernando Sáinz did not even attempt it, settling instead for a perfunctory

mention of certain terms and expressions. For example, when Helen Parkhurst says that with her plan students of one same group are meant to advance at their own rhythm, and not at the same speed, Sáinz adds that «here, the idea of a group is very different from that of the class in the graded schools» (Sáinz, 1923, p. 95). It follows that in the Dalton Plan, «grade or class» referred to a laboratory overseen by a teacher specialized in a subject, an idea that was familiar in Spanish pedagogical culture and was associated with the modernising tendency of the class system. Sáinz also goes on to affirm that «grade refers to students coinciding under the same work contracts» (Sáinz, 1923, p. 134), a circumstance that could occur in one subject but not in others. While this is very much his own interpretation, it does follow in the Spanish pedagogical tradition prior to the class system and ultimately descends from the Lancastrian system of separating the students into various groups according to their level in each of the different subjects. In this way Sáinz was conflating, under the term «grade», tradition and modernity, giving us an idea of how confounding and contradictory the Dalton Plan must have seemed to him. Not surprisingly, Sáinz spends the last part of the article criticising the plan, and this, at a time when it was seen as a cure-all in Anglo-Saxon pedagogical circles. Using expression that revealed an underlying insecurity – «we suspect», «we're afraid», «we can only imagine», «we're not certain» –, Sáinz asserted that the Dalton Plan took for granted a prior motivation on the part of the students for all of the subjects, that it was based on the presupposition that all of the students had a highly developed sense of responsibility, that carrying out the tasks or «assignments» (Sáinz, 1923, p. 137) was extremely complicated, and that the teacher's silence in the classroom generated a significant emptiness. These four critiques would seal the fate of the Dalton Plan in Spain.

This pioneering article puts on display one of the first characteristics of the Dalton Plan's reception in Spain: many of its core principles were interpreted before the basic ideas of Helen Parkhurst or the British pedagogues had even been translated. This propensity is also evident in the most important book published in Spain about the method, *La Escuela-Laboratorio Dalton* (1924). In this work, only certain sections of Parkhurst's original book (1922) are translated: chapter 2, «The Plan in Principle», from which the last part, which includes parents' opinions, has been left out, while a paragraph has been added by an unknown author who endeavours to relate the text to the Herbartian principle of concentration; chapter 3, «The Plan in Practice»; chapter 4, «Its Application.

A Concrete Example»; and a fragment of chapter 6, «Sample Assignments». The book brings together contributions from a number of different authors: the prologue by Nunn which includes a summary of the first chapter, in which Helen Parkhurst talks about her professional life; the first chapter of Evelyn Dewey's book (1922) on the Dalton Plan; excerpts from a very freely translated article by Adams (1922); and, most surprisingly, two critical articles published first in French by M. Garde and Roger Cousinet (1923). While Parkhurst and Dewey offer enthusiastic descriptions of the method, Adams is more sceptical and seems to see it as an incomplete system, or one yet under construction. Garde is disparaging in his criticism and considers that while the plan may be applicable in an Anglo-Saxon context, it is next to worthless in a Latin system. Roger Cousinet makes the subtle insinuation that the method does not really give students the freedom to design their own programs. This work was reproduced almost literally in *La Escuela Moderna* (Anonimo, 1927) but there was no acknowledgement of its having been originally published by *La Lectura*; it was presented instead as a summary of *La Escuela Salvadoreña*.

During this process of reception of the Dalton Plan in Spain it is surprising how few articles were written by Helen Parkhurst and how late they were divulged. Just four articles appeared in pedagogical journals. *La Escuela Moderna* reproduced the essay of *Progressive Education* (Parkhurst, 1924a), that had previously been published in the *Revista de Educación* in Havana. In this article, Parkhurst describes the Dalton Plan as an instrument for converting a school into a cooperative community, she speaks of learning through projects and she barely mentions individualisation (Parkhurst, 1924b). The article in *Boletín de la Institución Libre de Enseñanza* is a complete and literal copy of the chapter «The Plan in Principle», taken from the edition published by *La Lectura* (Parkhurst, 1925). The journal *Revista de Pedagogía* published the only article written by Parkhurst specifically for a Spanish publication, and in it the author expresses her apprehension at the idea that her method might «degenerate into a method of individual instruction» (Parkhurst, 1928, p. 97). At the same time, she praises the idea of the classroom and its importance as a social unit. The journal *La Escuela Moderna* published her last article, translated from the Uruguayan *Anales de Instrucción Primaria* and consisting of a freely reformulated version of the essay published in *Progressive Education* in 1924. In this text the author acknowledges the many different ways in which the Dalton Plan

had been appropriated, admitting that «at times it is very hard for me to recognize it» (Parkhurst, 1931, p. 362).

Another characteristic of the Dalton Plan's reception in Spain can be found in the laxity and freedom of the translations, which often resulted in the texts' acquiring a completely different meaning. Translators tended to act as mediators between the text and the readers, interpreting the original writings and fashioning with them pedagogical concepts that would be easily understandable to Spanish educators. Fernando Sáinz's version of the book written by Lynch on the Dalton Plan is just such an example. To begin with, the class system or class teaching, to which the individualised method was meant to stand in contrast, was translated as «old system», thus completely changing the context. Where Lynch explains that «under the class system the «average» was the governing factor, under the Plan it is the mental «under-dog» that demands attention» (Lynch, 1924, p. 39), Sáinz interprets the affirmation as follows: «In the old system of lessons, discipline and order were the teacher's nightmare; under the Dalton Plan it is the student's mental process that is the centre of attention» (Lynch, 1930, p. 18). Where Lynch announces what could be considered a rallying cry for the Progressive Education, «The Dalton Plan is essentially a laboratory plan. Miss Parkhurst thus expresses the idea. She desires that the rooms of the school be «sociological laboratories with children as experimenters»» (Lynch, 1924, p. 30), Sáinz transforms it thus: «The Dalton Plan is essentially a laboratory plan. The author wishes the classrooms to be sociological laboratories where the children are the objects and the teachers are the experimenters» (Lynch, 1930, p. 8).

This translation of Lynch's words goes beyond mere interpretation and can be seen as an «adaptation» of Lynch's ideas expressly for the Spanish schools. Fernando Sáinz himself (Lynch, 1930, p. 33) acknowledged as much, implying that the tasks and assignments offered by Lynch might all be subject to modifications to facilitate their conforming to Spanish cultural considerations. Sáinz drew up contracts, which he presented as questionnaires on subject matter, which consisted of extensive lists of themes and subjects but with no appreciable curricular novelty. With subjects that Lynch had approached in greater depth, such as free exchange, the war in Crimea or the rebellion in India, there was no attempt to substitute these topics with less specifically British issues; all of this made it hard to discern the essence of the method, which all too often was reduced to long sets of exercises and exams that tested the students' knowledge.



It seems evident that Fernando Sáinz did not hold the Dalton Plan in much esteem. While his aversion to it may have begun during his stay in England, it likely grew and was bolstered by his readings of the French pedagogues, who, following in the path of Ferrière, did not think much of it. In his interpretation of the Dalton Plan, Sáinz offers some of his thoughts: if this method is understood to consist simply of the practice of individual tasks then it is hard to consider it «a serious teaching system», especially at a time during which the newest tendencies in education «agree on the need to replace solitary work with cooperation and solidarity among groups of workers» (Sáinz, 1928, p. 15). This opinion was shared by other pedagogues, among them Rubén Landa, who did not believe that the Dalton Plan served to «encourage a spirit of cooperation among students», despite what its proponents claimed (Landa, 1928, p. 475).

The critical judgement formulated by Fernando Sáinz against the Dalton Plan was enough to discourage the most avid supporters of Progressive Education innovations. He claimed that the method had only been tried in the United States and in Great Britain, which was untrue; the plan had attracted great interest in Holland as well as in the Nordic countries. He objected to the idea that a teacher's lessons could be substituted by the students' free investigation. He criticised the fact that the method did not actually lead to a change in the programs and that the questionnaires and assignments written up by publishers ended up being much like the traditional textbooks. He warned against the danger of plagiarising and copying from books, given the excessive emphasis that the method placed on the printed word. He pointed to the difficulties involved in implementing the plan derived from the need for specialized teachers and for the large buildings required for its practice. So many negative elements did he find in the Dalton Plan that Sáinz felt compelled to offer some final words of justification: while he wasn't against the method, he wanted «to warn those intent on using it of its dangers» (Sáinz, 1928, p. 110).

And, sure enough, the teachers who made mention of the Dalton Plan focused for the most part on the negative, emphasising the importance of the program and criticising «the tyranny of the textbook», which came to substitute the teacher's word (López, 1936, p. 210), the mechanisation of topics, which were supposed to follow Herbart's eight formal stages – we should remember that this reference was never proposed by Parkhurst but rather appeared in a freely added paragraph of the edition by La

Lectura –, the impossibility of applying it to younger children who had not yet developed a sense of responsibility, and finally, the great expense involved in implementing the plan (Anónimo, 1932, p. 469). This final argument took firm hold among teachers' groups and came to be repeated regularly under Franco: «It is exorbitantly expensive and therefore only suited for rich schools» (¿Onieva?, 1958, p. 14).

### Appropriation of the Dalton Plan among Spanish teachers

In Spain, the Dalton Plan was not perceived as appropriate for use in the public school, and there is evidence that during the decade of the 1920s it was the forward-thinking private schools that showed the greatest interest in the method. One example is the *Escuela Nueva Damón*, in Barcelona. Founded in 1926 by the *Fraternidad Internacional de Educación* and affiliated with the *Bureau International des Écoles Nouvelles*, its promotional pamphlets boasted of its following the most modern teaching methods, especially the Montessori method and the Dalton Plan. An adaptation of the plan for children aged ten and older was also used in the *Escuela Internacional Española*, founded in Madrid in 1928 by José Castillejo and other intellectuals. Some of its school's practices were adopted by the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, for example, having students give lectures to their classmates, an activity that was incorporated into the curriculum around 1933 and was known as *el Ateneo Escolar*.

Some of the more forward-thinking public schools took an interest in the Dalton Plan as well, although in general its adoption was less explicit. Miguel Catalán, one of the «pedagogical explorers» who had been in London during the heyday of the new method in the early 1920s, applied a system of «units» in his Physics classes which each student followed at his or her own rhythm. Years later, one of his students, Carmen de Zulueta, realised, upon matriculating her daughter in the Dalton School of New York, that «what we did in our physics class in Madrid was the Dalton Plan» (Zulueta, 2000, p. 57). Ángel Llorca, the only Spaniard to have heard John Eades speak about the Dalton Plan in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress organised by the New Education Fellowship in Montreux-Territet (Switzerland), incorporated in the school «Cervantes» a practice in which his students drew up a work plan of their own, whose completion the

teacher evaluated on a monthly basis (Pozo, 2008, pp. 76-80). Llorca began with this activity in 1925, and while he never gave it a name, his colleagues identified it with the Dalton Plan; images of its use bring to mind the iconographic representation of the Dalton Plan that had become universally recognised, as we can see in Photograph 2. Teachers in the school «Magdalena Fuentes» in Madrid experimented with a similar approach in 1930 when they split their subjects into «ten monthly portions» with a weekly division of units. The students then worked freely compiling information and presenting their final work for each subject (Anonimo, 1931, p. 12). And in Catalonia, Sixte Vila, a teacher from the school group «Joan Bruguera» in Gerona promoted the use of weekly work guidelines and autodidactic control sheets that encouraged qualitative evaluations that were reminiscent of a Daltonian approach.

---

PHOTOGRAPH 2. School «Cervantes», circa 1930

---



Source: Archives of the school «Cervantes»

The Second Republic saw a great wave of enthusiasm among young teachers on their way to their first jobs at schools in rural areas, eager to try new teaching methods. One such case was that of the novelist Dolores Medio, who upon hearing about the Dalton Plan in 1935 from her professor of pedagogy, retained just one, basic fact: «that it is organized by a woman». The young teacher went off to her teaching post in the town of La Estrada, keen to try her own «Strada-Laboratory-Plan» (Medio, 1993, p. 135). This story gives us an idea of how some forward-thinking teachers identified with the heroic tale of Helen Parkhurst and even appropriated the concept of the «laboratory» as a way of characterising their penchant for experimenting with educational methods.

## Conclusions

By analysing the conduct of the Spanish educators who visited England and came into contact with the Dalton Plan we are able to offer some general conclusions regarding their role as «pedagogical explorers». In the first place, although some of them came face to face with the Dalton Plan at precisely the same moment that it reached Great Britain, they do not seem to have been aware of the novelty that it represented. This may have been due to the fact that, like many of their English colleagues, they simply did not see it as being especially revolutionary. But whereas their British colleagues were able to establish a parallelism with the past individualised system and the methodologies used in a one-room school, the Spanish pedagogues did not readily grasp this idea, despite the fact that the reality of the one-room school would have been recent and familiar to them. Secondly, the first Spanish visitors were little more than observers; they described the material, physical aspects of the schools, but they had little direct contact with the principals and teachers, they avoided making any sort of personal interpretations and they were unlikely to have perceived potential problems. In contrast to this detachment, Marcelo Agudo, six years later, was able to provide a much more detailed, in-depth picture of the panorama in these schools, thanks to the fact that he enjoyed continued contact with the teachers, who, for their part, were more critical of the Dalton Plan at this moment. Other pedagogues who had early contact with the method *in situ*, such as Margarita Comas, do not mention it in their published writings, although

it does have a place in their personal diaries and notes; that is to say, these authors neither recognised nor commented on the Dalton Plan as a new method until it had been accredited as such by the New Education Fellowship. And despite the fact that it was one of the specific aims of the visits underwritten by the JAE, no guidelines for adapting the method in Spain were established, nor were any connections with the Spanish school practices promoted, resulting in a general de-contextualization of the pedagogues' observations. But perhaps the greatest paradox of all is that Lorenzo Luzuriaga and Fernando Sáinz were both residing in London at the very time that the national newspapers were full of news about the Dalton Plan and schools were opening their doors to put their novelties on display to visitors. It would seem that the future architects of the knowledge about the Progressive Education in general – and the Dalton Plan in particular – failed to even notice the enthusiasm surrounding the movement. The absence of a single mention of the phenomenon leads us to suspect that the circulation of pedagogical ideas was confined in their case to the written word; personal contact and observation of the reality in schools at the time seem to have played a little part.

The success of the Dalton Plan in Anglo-Saxon countries had much to do with its appearing in the right place at the right time, at a moment when many educators were searching for an alternative to the class system and a label that would bring together the myriad ideas and tendencies that were in the air at the time and that had in common a focus on greater individualisation. The circumstances surrounding the Dalton Plan's reception in Spain allow us to see its reception as a case of the wrong receipt appearing at the wrong time. This can be explained in part by the fact that the class system had as yet only tenuous roots in Spain and was still seen as the ideal of modernisation, whereas the Dalton Plan was perceived as a return of sorts to the old system represented by the one-room school. What's more, educators did not see the new method as one that encouraged socialising values. During the Second Republic a greater emphasis was placed on approaches such as the Project method, which were seen as having more in common with values of cooperation and solidarity which the regime wished to foster through its educational system.

The lack of clarity of some of Helen Parkhurst's ideas, along with her insistence on addressing critics who considered her method as overly individualistic, did not help her cause or her popularity in Spanish

pedagogical circles. The French and Swiss held considerable influence over their Spanish counterparts, who excoriated the Dalton Plan, often with blatantly contradictory accusations; one moment it was being labelled the most radical of all reforms, only to be accused the next moment of being the least revolutionary. This is how it would end up in the textbooks of the History of Education, its image that of an imperfect system of individualisation. We can attribute this image to the Spanish pedagogues of the 1930s.

### Bibliographical references

- Adams, J. (1922). The Dalton Plan. In *Modern Developments in Educational Practice*. London: University of London Press, 162-184.
- Agudo, M. (1928a). Informe sobre la West Green School. En Expediente de Marcelo Agudo Garat; Archivo JAE, 2-59.
- Agudo, M. (1928b). Nota resumen de las escuelas visitadas en Inglaterra en Octubre – 1928; Archivo JAE, A-12.
- Anónimo. (1927). La Escuela Dalton. *La Escuela Moderna*, vol. XXXVII, n°s 427, 428, 431, 432, 434 y 435, 169-177, 234-240, 379-384, 426-430, 512-517 y 556-562.
- Anónimo. (1931). El grupo escolar «Magdalena Fuentes». *Cultura Española*, vol. II, n° 13, 11-12.
- Anónimo. (1932). Ideas sobre el plan Dalton. *El Magisterio Español*, n° 8.998, 468-469.
- Bagchi, B, Fuchs, E., & Rousmaniere, K. (eds.) (2014). *Connecting histories of education. Transnational and cross-cultural exchanges in (post)colonial education*. New York: Berghahn.
- Barceló, G.; Comas, F. y Sureda, B. (2016). Abriendo la *caja negra*: la escuela pública española de postguerra. *Revista de Educación*, 371, 61-82.
- Brooks, R. (1998). *King Alfred School and the Progressive Movement, 1898-1998*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Bruno-Jofré, R., & Schriewer, J. (2012). *The global reception of John Dewey's thought. Multiple refractions through time and space*. New York: Routledge.

- Comas, M. (1921). *Memoria*. Archivo JAE, C-161.
- Cousinet, R. (1923). Reseña del libro de Helen Parkhurst, *Education on the Dalton Plan*. *L'Éducation*, juillet.
- Dewey, E. (1922). *The Dalton Laboratory Plan*. London & Toronto: Dent & Sons.
- Espagne, M. (2013). La notion de transfert culturel, *Revue Sciences/Lettres*, vol. 1, 1-9.
- Garde, Cousinet, Dewey, E., Adams, Nunn y Parkhurst (1924). *La Escuela-Laboratorio Dalton*. Madrid: La Lectura.
- Jackman, E.D. (1920). The Dalton Plan. *The School Review*, vol. 28, nº 9, 688-696.
- Lager, D. (1983). *Helen Parkhurst and the Dalton Plan: The life and work of an American educator* (Tesis inédita de doctorado). The University of Connecticut.
- Landa, R. (1928). Reseña del libro de Fernando Sáinz, *El Plan Dalton*. *Revista de Pedagogía*, vol. VII, nº 82, 475-476.
- Lee, L.F. (2000). The Dalton Plan and the loyal, capable intelligent citizen. *History of Education*, vol. 29, nº 2, 129-138.
- López, M. (1936). *La escuela activa y democrática*. Barcelona: Imp. Elzeviriana y Lib. Camí.
- Lynch, A.J. (1924). *Individual work and the Dalton Plan*. London: George Philip & Son.
- Lynch, A.J. (1930). *El trabajo individual en la escuela según el Plan Dalton*. Trad. de Fernando Sáinz. Madrid: Pub. de la Revista de Pedagogía.
- Medio, D. (1993). *Diario de una Maestra*. Madrid: Castalia.
- Monés, J. (2011). *La pedagogia catalana al segle XX. Els seus referents*. Lleida: Pagès.
- ¿Onieva, A.J.? (1958). Algunas indicaciones sobre el Plan Dalton. *Servicio*, nº 637, 14.
- Parkhurst, H. (1922). *Education on The Dalton Plan*. London: G. Bell & Sons.
- Parkhurst, H. (1924a). The Dalton Laboratory Plan. *Progressive Education*, vol. I, 8-12.
- Parkhurst, H. (1924b). El Plan de Dalton. *La Escuela Moderna*, vol. XXXIV, nº 399, 887-895.
- Parkhurst, H. (1925). Los principios del Plan Dalton. *Boletín de la Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, vol. XLIX, nº 782, 142-147.

- Parkhurst, H. (1928). El Plan Dalton de Laboratorio. *Revista de Pedagogía*, vol. VII, nº 75, 97-104.
- Parkhurst, H. (1931). El Plan Dalton. *La Escuela Moderna*, vol. XLI, nº 479, 358-369.
- Ploeg, P. van der (2013). The Dalton Plan: recycling in the guise of innovation. *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 49, nº 3, 314-329.
- Ploeg, P. van der (2014). The salient history of Dalton education in the Netherlands. *History of Education*, vol. 43, nº 3, 368-386.
- Pozo, M.M. del (2005). La renovación pedagógica en España (1900-1939): Etapas, características y movimientos. En E. Candeias (Ed.), *Vº Encontro Ibérico de História da Educação. Renovação Pedagógica* (115-159). Castelo Branco: Alma Azul.
- Pozo, M.M. del (2007). Desde l'Ermitage a la Escuela Rural Española: Introducción, difusión y apropiación de los «centros de interés» decrolyanos (1907-1936). *Revista de Educación*, nº extr., 143-166.
- Pozo, M.M. del (2008). Las «fundaciones» de Ángel Llorca. En Á. Llorca, *Comunidades Familiares de Educación* (15-151). Barcelona: Octaedro.
- Pozo, M.M. del (2009). The transnational and national dimensions of pedagogical ideas: the case of the project method, 1918-1939. *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 45, nºs 4&5, 561-584.
- Pozo, M.M. del y Rabazas, T. (2013). Políticas educativas y prácticas escolares: la aplicación de la Ley de Enseñanza Primaria de 1945 en las aulas. *Bordón. Revista de Pedagogía*, vol. 65, nº 4, 119-133.
- Pozo, M.M. del (2014). Community and the myth of the ideal school: Circulation and appropriation of the Hamburg *Gemeinschaftsschulen* in Spain (1922-1933). *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 50, nº 5, 599-614.
- Sáinz, F. (1923). Un nuevo sistema de educación y organización escolar. El «Dalton Laboratory Plan». *Revista de Pedagogía*, vol. II, nºs 15 y 16, 92-97 y 132-137.
- Sáinz, F. (1928). *El Plan Dalton*. Madrid: Pub. de la Revista de Pedagogía.
- Viñao, A. (2015). Politics, education and pedagogy: ruptures, continuities and discontinuities (Spain, 1936-1939). *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 51, nº 4, 405-417.
- Zulueta, C. de (2000). *La España que pudo ser. Memorias de una institucionista republicana*. Murcia: Universidad de Murcia.



**Contact address:** Universidad de Alcalá, Facultad de Educación, Departamento de Ciencias de la Educación. Aulario María de Guzmán, C/ San Cirilo s/n, E-28801, Alcalá de Henarés (Madrid). E-mail: mar.delpozoandres@gmail.com