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TAS SZEBEDY

the author's review of

THE EFFECTS OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES ON THE LIVES AND DEVELOPMENTS OF SCHOOLS IN HUNGARY SINCE 1990

PHD THESIS

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1. REASONS FOR THE CHOICE OF SUBJECT

The author of this thesis has long been passionately preoccupied with the topic of school development. He has been studying the reform proceedings of different educational policies since 1986. He is engaged in the creative work¹ of numerous social and professional organizations. His interest in the topic of school development also takes its roots in the history of the Városmajori Secondary School, which was founded 18 years ago at the time of the political transformation.²

Educational policy has become a very dynamically developing area in the past decades. New opportunities opened up for research and educational policy analysis on both national and school levels. There are a great deal of research results in the field of educational management that can be used effectively in the study of school development. Never before affected so numerous waves of changes schools of public education than during the time of the past four governments. These have partially international reasons (Halász 1993, Loboda Z. 1994).

The democratization of the Central-Eastern-European states (Setényi 1990, Nagy Mária), the preparation of the accession to the European Union (Halász – Lannert – Balázs 1997) and the international problems of education all appeared in the background of the development of Hungarian public education (Coombs, Ph.H 1971, Husén T. – Tuijnman, A. – Halls, W.D. 1992).

2. SUBJECT AND PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH

The subject of research: the effects of different educational policies on the lives and developments of schools in Hungary from the 1990s until 2006.

This PhD dissertation examines this key question by analyzing the relationship between the influence of the central educational policy and the practices of five innovative secondary schools.

The main question is how the central educational policy initiatives (regulations and developments) of the last four governments influenced the development of five innovative secondary schools.

The author studied three main problem areas:

- 1. What characterizes the educational policies of the last fifteen years?
- 2. How did the the central educational policy initiatives (regulations and developments) of the last four governments influence the development of five innovative secondary schools?
- 3. How can school development be best described? What are the best methods?

The main objective of this thesis was the examination of what kind of educational policy tendencies took place in Hungary in the last fifteen years, and how these influenced the actual school developments and innovations.

The basic problem is the study of the theoretical questions of educational policy, and the second one is what the relationship is between the national policy and the school practice. The

¹ The author also investigates how the central reform initiatives can be reconciled with the daily school practice. As president of the National Association of Secondary Schools, he is concerned with the incorporation of the bottom up changes into the central educational policy, and as headteacher he is trying to have schools accept and adopt the positive messages of reforms in the everyday practice.

² The Multiprofile Pedagogical Program of the Városmajori Secondary School, 1996

third question is according to what and with what kind of methods school developments can be best analized.

3. THE KEY CONCEPTS USED IN THE RESEARCH

In the dissertation the definitions of the following key concepts can be found:

- -The educational system
- -The educational policy
- -The central educational policy initiatives
- -Governmental (public educational policy) reforms
- -The innovative secondary school
- -Development and development policy
- -The course of development, the change of the course of development
- -The student organization
- -Complexity
- -Complexity theory

4. RESEARCH STRATEGIES, METHODS, STEPS

Both deductive and inductive strategies were used in the research. After examining the international and national literature, the analysis discussed the most important questions and problems of the different educational policies. The inductive analysis is based on the analysis of school documents and on interviews with the headteachers.

I investigated five schools that have either been transformed since 1990 or were established at that time: the Karinthy Frigyes Bilingual Secondary School, the Alternative Secondary School of Economics (AKG), the Illyés Gyula Secondary School in Budaörs, the Kossuth Lajos Secondary and Vocational School in Mosonmagyaróvár as well as the Városmajori Secondary School. I chose these particular schools because their programs, their foundation or a successful development of theirs took place at the same time as the political transformation, therefore their histories serve as excellent examples for the educational development after the political changes. My choice can also be justified by the fact that all of the above mentioned schools worked out a successful and viable alternative from the reform efforts of the political transformation.

5. RESEARCH METHODS

A few words about the interviews

The half-structured interview can be placed between the structured and non-structured interviews. In this case the interview can be compared to an everyday discussion of a topic, in the course of which questions are not necessarily asked in a predetermined order. Most of the questions are known to both parties, but there is some space left for improvisation based on the given answers. Thus the subject can be exploited in more details, further questions and remarks can be added. One question is derived from another one, yet the guiding principle of all the interviews follows the same pattern.

In most cases one of my colleagues accompanied me for the interviews. He gave me invaluable assistance in the long process of questoning or with those interviews that required meeting several times. My assistant had an important role in making sure that our attention is not diverted from the pre-planned interview questions, because the good personal relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, the similar character of daily work and frequent discussions of the problems of public education would otherwise easily have done so.

This help was especially important with the discussion of how the endogenous and extrogenous processes were connected to each different government policy. (Irving Seidman, 2002)

Interviews without the presence of an assistant – though they might have been more exciting - are less structured and take a lot more time. It took a great deal of energy not to analyze the tendencies that span over different government periods and to stick to the series of questions that were previously agreed on and handed over to the interviewees. Eventually these semi-structured interviews gave way to understanding very serious correlations. This constitutes the main body of the analytical part of this thesis.

5.1 The first step

As the first step of my research I identified the most significant innovations of the four different governmental periods, that openly aimed at influencing the development of secondary schools. This list had been validated and complemented previously during the preparation phase of the interviews. (Mezei Gabriella, 2006)

I visited the selected institutions and prepared the interviews (McCracken, G., 1988), made appointments, and agreed with the interviewees on how many times we need to meet to finish the whole 'semi-structured' interview. Since I have a good relationship with the leaders of the schools that participated in the research, I found it easy to persuade them to cooperate.

During the school visits I studied the school's documents, and borrowed some of them to carry out examinations. I made a tour of the school building collecting empirical experience about the status of their developments and infrastructure. (Szokolszky Ágnes, 2004)

These visits had a very important psychological aspect: they enabled me to grasp their ambience, to enter the spirit of the successful innovative environment from the point of view of the researcher.

5.2 The second step

As the second step I documented the following (for the period between 1991-2006):

- The main events of the inner (endogenous) structural and pedagogical development
- The development innovations of the central (exogenous) educational management
- The institutional reception of the innovations of the central educational management

5.3 The third step

In the third step I categorized the answers given to the interview questions (Cohen, L., Manion L., Morrison L.). I selected typical central educational policy innovations. In the course of their analysis (in the form of a case study, Golnhofer, 2001) I found the typical ways of institutional reception.

5.4 The fourth step

The fourth step focused on the more detailed comparison of the selected cases (e.g. pedagogical program and local curriculum) in all the five schools. I used the semi-structured interviews and the school documents to do so.

In this phase of the research I could analyze the institutions from multiple points of view:

- The history of the institutions
- The characteristics of the pedagogical programs
- The analysis of the structure and culture of organization
- The relationship between the schools and the public educational policy innovations
- The survey of the reform processes from their origin to their stabilization

6 THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDOF THE RESEARCH

I examined the literature of educational policy, structural development and management development very thoroughly and found that all these have been very extensively studied ever since the political transformation of the early 1990s. The most important antecedents of the Hungarian research were based on the Anglo-Saxon educational theory and model, therefore I studied these with a strong emphasis. Among the most significant authors I found the works of *Archer*, *M.S.*; *Bush*, *T.*; *Caldwell*, *J.B.*; *Murgatroyd*, *St.*; *Mintzberg*, *H.*; *Hopkins D.* and among the Hungarian authors *Gábor Halász*, *Zoltán Báthory*, *János Setényi* the most relevant. The above mentioned authors are considered very noteworthy in every aspect of the Hungarian educational research. The works I studied offered a very good overall picture of the culture of developments since 1990.

During my research I made use of the new organizational development efforts. The results of the research on organizational culture as well as the different aspects of the development of school culture are also given a key role. In addition, I focused on the dimensions of development, transition and the formation of something new and the current results of quality management.

In the field of the reform processes in public education a new approach appeared in the last decade in Michael Fullan's work entitled 'Change Forces: The Sequel' (1999). His theory dealing with the development of complex systems serves as an important backgrund of my research.

7. THE SUMMARY OF RESULTS

7.1 The characteristics of educational efforts

This research summarized the characteristics of educational policy efforts and innovations since the 1990s. It did not only collect and enlist these results, but also compared them to the reactions of the five innovative secondary schools. While doing so, it applied the most current theories and approaches of school development and the results of empirical works.

7.2 The reactions of schools

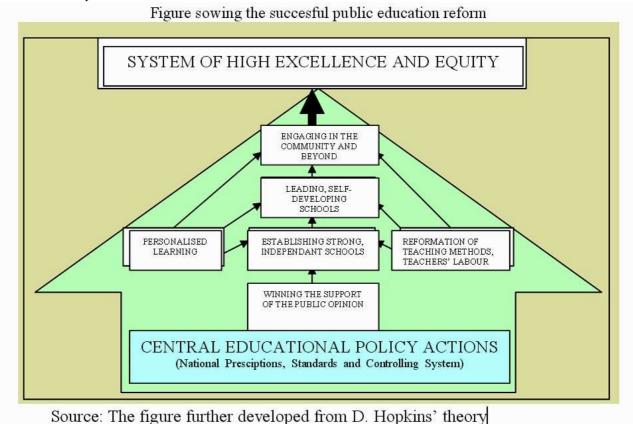
The analysis brought to light the typical reactions of the five innovative schools to the educational policy initiatives.

These are the following:

- creative identification with the central initiatives by inner development
- active usage of the results and regulations
- passive realization of those regulations that are not in accordance with the school's ideas
- only formal fulfillment of those administrative regulations that are not supervisedor of those initiatives that do not have a developmental effect

- in some cases sabotage, open refusal of those central regulations that are regressive, restricting or increase the burden.

During the course of analysis and interpretation of the characteristics of the schools I adapted and further developed David Hopkins' (2005) definition of 'A High Excellence, High Equity Educational System.'



7.3 The aspects of development

In the course of the research and on the basis of the analysis and interpretation of the results, a series of aspects were worked out that enabled me to do a more detailed description of the school developments.

8. CONCLUSION

The possible reasons for the successes or failures of the pedagogical, management and organizational development processes are summarized, and their connections with the continuous changes of the educational policies of the different governments are systematized in this thesis.

The relationship of centralization – decentralization with the educational policy initiatives

Originally the selected five schools agreed with the decentralization plans, they often even identified themselves with them completely, later, however, they took over fewer and fewer measures. On the other hand these independent schools generally could not find the common objectives with the centralization educational policy efforts. The success of these schools was established in the time of the expansion of public education and one of the returns of their success was the growth of the number of the applying students and the selection on the basis of students' abilities. Other changes and central reforms were resisted.

The operation of the schools were influenced primarily by those educational policy innovations which coincided with their individual, autonomous ambitions. The Alternative Secondary School of Economics (AKG) has always been the most independent among the five schools. The documents and interviews show very clearly that they did not follow the central educational policy innovations.

The documents and interviews also show that the organizational development appears as the inner, endogenous development area in all five schools. All of them have a strong middle management level, except for the AKG which does not have a top leader, though György Horn has a central role as the main patron of the school. The other schools follow the dual management model or have a wider strata of management or a board of directors; in one case a school council body is responsible for managing the school, although a one-person responsibility is required by law. The multiple leader organizational culture accepted the message of the organizational learning and its methods and processes. In this respect these five schools follow the patterns of a very up-to-date organization theory and development though they do not necessarily follow the rules and regulations of the central reforms, but act partly independently from them.

These schools are also known for adapting the most modern methodology. One of their ways to success is the introduction of learning methodology into their curriculum. Life-long learning has become a key issue and a new field for inner development. A wide variety of methods are used for developing competencies. The appearance of these was supported by the central reforms, their realization, however, had a very individual pace serving the purpose of the local expectations.

The wave of structural reorganization in the 1990s appeared in all five schools. This was one of the reasons why these schools had an overabundance of applicants and became so selective.

As opposed to the central developments the ratio of free self developments was much higher in these schools. In AKG one can find predominantly only free self developments, in Illyés the majority of decisions are of such character. In Karinthy the International Baccaleurate program provided the school with an external non-Hungarian central development. Kossuth carried out their own organizational development and quality management plan long before the central developments in Hungary did. The most central development can be found in the Városmajori Gimnázium, which works in the most traditional way out of these five schools. The developments were supported by the local governments, the financiers of the schools regardless of political views and principles.

Without any exception the schools regarded the positive relationship with the parents, the selection of a good student body, the development of abilities and talents as prime tasks. This is much more the effect of modern international trends than the regulations stated by law. School financing has constantly been reduced, therefore the parents (primarily intellectuals) can give a great deal of help, and they often do. The situation is very similar in the same type of schools in most European countries.

Because in the Hungarian educational system the past reform era succeeded a very centralized system, creating a balance is the most important issue now. The five schools in my analysis are coming closer to this balance. The new educational policy based on the regulations of NAT 2003 (National Curriculum 2003) and on the regulations and requirements of the new

two-level final examination (secondary school leaving examination) as well as on new laws and series of amendments can only achieve its educational political objectives by ensuring very strict and thorough control. Therefore the main objective is to establish a 'high excellence, high equity educational system.'

10. THE POSSIBLE CONTINUATION OF RESEARCH

The main objective of this PhD thesis is to demonstrate how the changes in educational policies of different governments influenced the development of five Hungarian secondary schools. We attempted to make a survey of the characteristics of educational policies. Finally we summarized the possible reasons for the successes and failures of pedagogical, management and organisational development processes and systematized their connections with the continuous changes of the educational policies of the different governments.

The framework of this present research was not sufficient to answer certain questions. This raises the direction of further study. It is worth continuing the research on the connections of the expectations of the micro- and macro-environment of the schools with the educational policy intentions and reform processes.

The research deals with successful and independent schools that started strategic developments at the time of the political transformation in Hungary. This revealed numerous similarities, but restricted the study of more overall questions. The question arises whether it is possible to create a successful school development without becoming acquainted with the expextations of the environment and the continuous adjustment to them. This can only be discussed within the framework of a new research. During the analysis of the development policies certain regularities occured, that can help the formation of calculated development strategies. The analysis of schools that do not study their environment in great depth could contribute to a new, relevant comparison.

Another issue worth studying is whether the comparison of the consecutive public education political waves of reform and the international expectations of the era could help to make the processes of school development more conscious and calculable. School development most probably could become more calculable, especially if it is prepared with more conscious examination. A third question is whether the effective social communication is a primary condition of the success of school modernization, since without this winning the public opinion is impossible and that is indispensible to the success of reforms.

Finally, a further study³ of the realization of reforms would be necessary to see how effective they are. This thesis also attempted to do that. Though the system is getting more and more complex and can only be studied as a learning process, the research of the realization of reforms and their objectives is important. Certain situations, though with limited validity, can be modelled. As the continuation of the present research both successful and failure cases should be studied in detail to see what kind of lessons could be drawn from this comparison. Perhaps such a research could better prepare the innovations of overall reforms that are very expensive procedures.

³ Numerous studies have shown that the effectiveness of education, let it be the quality of teaching and learning or the compensation of social disadvantage, is largely determined by local, institutional and personal factors, that can only be changed slightly -or only at a very high price- by reforms on the macro level. See Gábor Halász: 'Changes in the Leadership of European Public Education Systems', p.90.

11. SUMMARY

This PhD thesis examines the effects of educational policies after the political transformation in Hungary on the lives and developments of schools by analyzing five selected institutions that formed/established their own development strategies and innovative programs already at the beginning of the 1990s. The developments of these successful schools were compared to those reform political initiative, the objective of which was to break away from the previous old practice in accordance with the continuous central educational policy principals.

The analysis has shown how the successful pedadogical communities and their leaders reacted to the central initiatives, to what extent they could identify themselves with those, how they ignored or avoided some of them and how they could stick to their own development strategies even against the central regulations. The two main challenges after the political transformation were the questions of democratization and the creation of the tools of development. Schools lived their everyday lives, while the international expectations formulated newer and newer directions for change for the educational policies of the various governments. The democratic transformation of the whole system as well as the creation of an effective educational system in spite of the negative demographic indicators also meant big challenges. Besides the above mentioned main questions, problems of secondary importance had to be faced as well. The four consecutive educational ministries represented different views: some of them supported autonomy and the development according to local needs, while others stood for centralization, sustainability and equal opportunity.

The most important difficulty of the past few years for the schools that were made to step out of the previously stable and centrally governed system was the management of the waves of reform, the continuous change of directions that were often difficult to comprehend. The sheer survival called for a fundamental change of approach during this period, and a lot of energy was dedicated to carry out the developments. The main objective of this research is to answer the following questions: how can the implementation of the reform initiatives be analyzed, described, and modelled.

The results show that there are analyzable and illuminating correlations that can contribute to making the central reforms more effective. These can give assistance to schools in the realization of their own development strategies. This study confirms the importance of the research dealing with the examination of the implementation of reforms as suggested by the model of Michael Fullan (1999) and David Hopkins (2005).

In conclusion the author of this thesis, both as a practising professional and an educational theoretician, expresses the firm belief that a constant research of the implementation of reforms is strongly required to change such a large system as public education that is financed from public funds.

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