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Summary of Ph.D. thesis

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**PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES AND BELIEFS
PROMOTING THE SCHOOL SUCCESS OF
DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN**

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Starting points

In my study I examined the pedagogical practices and beliefs promoting the school performance of disadvantaged children. It was necessary to put pedagogical practices into context as well as to analyse social and educational disadvantage from different viewpoints. This analysis suggested that inequalities are inter-related, they cross the borders of social subsystems and intensify one another. I found that major inequalities decrease the effectiveness of the educational system, which might cause considerable and unnecessary damage.

The pedagogical context showed the paradigms including different ways and degrees of decreasing educational inequalities. The pedagogical practice, the functioning of which can be examined on institution level, is of great importance in all the paradigms. Although pedagogical practices may be considerably different, all of them are determined by institutional, organizational factors and teachers' competence. Some pedagogical practices can be described as student centered while others are teacher centered. This considerable difference reflects differences in pedagogical culture. The question is how efficient and fruitful these practical pedagogies prove to be.

From the viewpoint of my research, the most important finding of the school effectiveness surveys was that schools preferring and implementing child centered pedagogy to traditional teacher centered pedagogy are more effective. It means that disadvantaged children attending such schools are more successful as well. The success of these disadvantaged students is also a result of the pedagogical practice influenced by the given institutional and organizational factors. Pedagogical practice can be described as a system of tools operated by the teacher, including elements of methodology, assessment, professional cooperation and self-development as well as special fields of developing students' competence. This extended interpretation of the pedagogical practice indicates the main targets of 'HEFOP' innovations, which I intend to explore among others in my research.

The aims of the research

One of the aims of my research was to explore the differences between the beliefs and practices of teachers working in institutions receiving considerable

financial and HR development support and opportunities for intensive further training through the Operative Human Resource Development Programme and those of teachers working in institutions receiving no such support, working out other types of pedagogical innovations. My main fields of interest were beliefs and practices related to the system of pedagogical tools, disadvantaged and Roma children, integration and segregation, major pedagogical problems and competence. Another aim of the study was to examine whether the education of disadvantaged and Roma children can be made more effective in the measured types of competence with the help of changing pedagogical tools and participation in training giving a chance of becoming a high-school graduate and improving future chances in the job market.

‘Non-traditional’ or student centered pedagogical culture can be described as pedagogy implementing teaching-learning methods and strategies based on the children’s active participation, exploration and cooperation as well as the competence and the extended role interpretation of the teacher. The typical features of ‘traditional’ pedagogical culture can be reconstructed due to research into previous pedagogical practice. (Falus 2001; M Nádasi 2001; Nahalka 1999; Golnhofer – Szekszárdi 2006) Its tools are poor as for elements of methodology, teaching strategies and assessment. That type of pedagogy is not adjusted to the students’ cognitive and socio-cultural characteristics, it is compensatorical, its aim is remedial education, the teachers often struggle alone, they are professionally isolated. Parents are not integrated in the educational processes. The role of the teacher is primarily teaching a certain subject. That kind of pedagogical culture can rather be called teacher centered.

Non-traditional pedagogical cultures can most often and most clearly be observed in the operation of foundation or private schools with reform pedagogical roots. They are frequently mentioned by the specialist literature as alternative pedagogical programmes or model programmes, in connection with the education of disadvantaged and Roma children (Torgyik 2004). Some of the common features of the different versions that exist are differentiated teaching, new forms and interpretations of assessment (without marks, promoting students’ development), basic values like being child centered and laying emphasis on the development of personality and skills as well as providing other public educational institutions with contents for pedagogical innovations. (Golnhofer - Szekszárdi, 2003)

Several innovation processes were started on national level in the past six years with the aim of promoting the transformation of the pedagogical culture in schools, providing institutions with funds. Several tenders were announced within the framework of the National Development Plan and the Operative Human Resources Development Programme (2.1.1 and 3.1.1) in order to support the integrated education of disadvantaged and Roma children and the introduction of competence based education in public education through pedagogical innovation. The primary targets of transforming the pedagogical culture through innovation were the system of pedagogical tools and the pedagogical approach. The transformation is taking place with the help of IPR (a special pedagogical system for the integration and skills development of disadvantaged children) and the introduction of competence based teaching, using programme packages, modules provided by the national programme. Innovations related to the system of pedagogical tools cover the following domains:

students' competence development (independent learning, social competence, career orientation, programmes preparing for further education, career building, ICT, reading comprehension, writing, foreign language, multicultural contents)

teachers' competence development (developing teachers' cooperation – case discussion, classroom observation, forum, self-knowledge, personality development, multicultural contents – intercultural education)

extracurricular programmes promoting integration (patron and tutor system, cooperation with the civil programme, art circles)

assessment (competence based assessment system, assessment without marks)

elements of methodology (differentiation, project method, project pedagogy, epochal education, alternative pedagogical methods, drama pedagogy)

As a starting-point I handle participation and winning in tenders related to the Operative Human Resource Development Programme (HEFOP) 2.1.1 and 3.1.1 (valued as 'participated' or 'did not participate') as independent variables in my research. Participating institutions ('HEFOP' group) joined supported school pedagogical innovations, which may generate changes in the system of

pedagogical tools and in pedagogical competence. Dependent variables are for instance the variables of effectiveness, tools and competence. Changes in the field of pedagogical tools and teachers' beliefs on their own competence and professional roles indicate moving away from the traditional pedagogical culture. My foundation is that the research will prove that this tendency is more significant in the 'HEFOP' group and also that education is more effective in this group, which may provide better opportunities for disadvantaged students as well.

The hypotheses of the research

The hypotheses of the research are formulated in the numbered headings. I introduce some of the hypotheses in a broader context, but these texts are not parts of the hypotheses. The hypotheses contain two statements in relation to the context. The verification or confutation of those will be discussed in the summary of the results of the research.

The higher effectiveness of 'HEFOP' schools is demonstrable in the further education data and also in the added value. That is:

1.1 Schools innovating in accordance with HEFOP produce higher added value.

1.2 More disadvantaged students get into secondary schools providing leaving certificate (Examination of Maturity) from schools carrying out innovations in accordance with HEFOP.

Based on the teachers' report we can state that in the HEFOP innovation group the teachers' practice is far from the 'traditional' pedagogical culture. This is indicated by the choice of the applied elements of the system of pedagogical tools as well as by the positive deviations (compared to the group of non-HEFOP innovators) in the field of the operation of teachers' competence and self-assessment, which is indicative of the implementation of student centered pedagogy.

2.1 Teachers of the HEFOP innovation group prefer and apply the tools of student centered pedagogy more frequently.

2.2 Teachers working in the HEFOP innovation group believe they are more capable of operating several types of competence characteristic of student centered pedagogy.

Students' school achievements are basically attributed by teachers to professional reasons which they influence more than the environment. Very few teachers think that there are external reasons in the background of students' success. The teachers of the HEFOP innovation group are definitely more self-confident when giving reasons for the students' success, while the teachers referring to external reasons are mainly members of the other group.

3.1 The majority of teachers attribute students' school success primarily to professional reasons.

3.2 The majority of teachers attributing students' school success primarily to external reasons are teachers working in non-HEFOP schools.

External, environmental factors play a significant role in teachers' attributions related to students' unsuccess in school. A considerable part of teachers put students' unsuccess down to environmental reasons. At the same time research found that members of the HEFOP group explain unsuccess with professional reasons in a higher degree, thus facing the possible internal, professional reasons in the background.

4.1 The majority of teachers attribute the students' un success to external, environmental reasons.

4.2 Among the teachers of the 'HEFOP innovation group' the proportion of those attributing students' unsuccess mainly to professional reasons is significantly higher.

The proportion of teachers in favour of integration, which provides better opportunities for a more effective teaching of Roma children, is higher among 'HEFOP' teachers. They believe that integration is more effective than segregation and they disapprove of pedagogical misconceptions and ethnic group stereotypes to a higher degree.

5.1 Teachers in the 'HEFOP innovation group' support integrative solutions to a higher degree.

5.2 Most of the misconceptions related to the education of Roma children are not acceptable for teachers in the 'HEFOP integration group'.

The methods of the research

In my research I employed descriptive and explorative research strategies to investigate relations. As for explorative methods I chose written questioning, as for processing I applied different statistical methods. (Falus 1993) My choices are explained by the fact that I did not have the opportunity to employ interviewers and observers, consequently a direct observation of classroom practices and the exploration of the deeper layers of teachers' beliefs were impossible for lack of time. In spite of these factors my research objectives remained realizable. When employing statistical methods I applied SPSS for Windows 10. I aimed at representative sample-taking as for essential aspects, on the basis of the available data I considered multi-stage selection the most suitable.

The list of institutions handing in successful applications related to integration and competence based education and obtaining central funds was available on the website of the Ministry of Education and Sulinova. I obtained more detailed regional and county level data with the help of the county authority (Heves Megyei Önkormányzat Pedagógiai Szakmai és Közművelődési Szolgáltató Intézménye). In this way the list of HEFOP institutions performing pedagogical innovations and their premises could be drawn up without a problem, including the possible multitude elements. The results of the 2007 national competence assessment, which are also available for the public, contain a list of premises, that is, the multitude elements of the other group to be examined.

I was not in the possession of a complete list of the institutions performing pedagogical innovations and the kinds of pedagogical innovations performed by them, so I was not able to differentiate on the basis of the type of innovations. That is the reason why I will label such institutions as 'traditional' or 'other' innovation groups, and these attributes simply refer to the fact that they perform non-HEFOP innovation. Because of the fact that the resources available for my research were rather limited I restricted the scope of the examination to sub-regional and town level instead of the originally planned county level. In order to ensure the possible representativeness I chose the multi-stage group sampling method, which is also known as a method based on random selection. (Lehota 2001)

The sample-taking – multi-stage group sampling

At the beginning of my research a complete list of multitude elements, including the teachers working in the senior section of different traditional and innovative primary schools in two major towns and villages of four subregions of Heves County, was not at my disposal. It means that it was not possible for me to apply merely group sampling. But I had the list of altogether 55 premises of schools performing different innovations, among them 11 town and 7 village schools innovating within the framework of the Operative Human Resource Development Programme, which enabled me to form groups of institutions.

Frame multitudes:

Town schools performing HEFOP (2.1.1 and 3.1.1) innovations

Village schools performing HEFOP (2.1.1 and 3.1.1) innovation

Town schools performing other (traditional) innovations

Village schools performing other (traditional) innovations

The final sample units:

Drawing up a complete list of the HEFOP groups and the group of town schools performing traditional innovations did not prove to be impossible when forming the final sample units. However, due to problems in the fields of cooperation and establishing contacts, I managed to reach fewer primary sample units than possible. I could examine only 15 institutions out of 20. Instead of a systematic sampling with k elements or simple random sampling, expected to result in a small number of samples, the sample was produced from the final sample units with full-scope questioning. All the senior section teachers in the groups had to be questioned in their premises. The only way for me to obtain information was by means of self-answered questionnaires, which inevitably results in a decrease of the number of elements in the final sample.

In the case of group 4, the group of village schools performing traditional innovations, the final sample units were produced by means of simple random selection and self-answered questionnaires, forming four groups in each statistical subregion. The table below contains the number of the final sample units

according to the pedagogical innovation and the type of the settlement as well as the number of the theoretically possible sample units:

table 1: Sample units

Sample units	HEFOP schools (towns)	HEFOP schools (villages)	Town schools performing other innovations	Village schools performing other innovations
primary sample units	11	7	6	<i>GKT</i> ; 16 <i>HKT</i> ; 9 <i>EKT</i> ; 4 <i>PKT</i> ; 2
final sample units	8	7	3	(1 from each subregion) 4

Inclination to answer:

In the final sample units all of the head-teachers and 86.7% of the senior section teachers filled in the questionnaires constructed for them. According to innovation groups the inclination to answer was 83.7% in the schools performing HEFOP innovations, while in schools performing traditional innovations the rate is 89.7%.

The sample and the process of questioning

The full sample consists of senior section teachers from 22 primary schools performing HEFOP funded innovations; 308 teachers and 22 head-teachers. The questionnaire made for head-teachers was different from the one constructed for the other teachers. The answers given by the head-teachers informed me about their beliefs and the special features of the institutions. The data related to the head-teachers outline a head-teachers' sub-pattern.

table 2: The structure of the full sample according to innovation groups and settlement types

	settlement types			
	villages		towns	
	group		group	
	Count	%	Count	%
HEFOP	68	55,7%	140	75,3%
other innovations	54	44,3%	46	24,7%

The main sample consists of 286 teachers, none of them are head-teachers. The structure of the main sample is presented in the following table.

table 3: The structure of the main sample according to innovation groups and settlement types

	settlement types			
	villages		towns	
	group		group	
	Count	%	Count	%
HEFOP	61	55,0%	132	75,4%
other innovations	50	45,0%	43	24,6%

Data collection, for which I employed two self-answered questionnaires, was carried out in March-June 2009. The questionnaire compiled for head-teachers gave me an opportunity to get information about school data and personal data as well, related to professional questions.

The questionnaire for the other teachers consisted of 27 questions and could be divided to six major units. These major units examined personal data, personal career, further education, special trainings, opinions about the school and the teachers' work, problems and working methods. Units 5 and 6 (*Students – parents – school* and *Competence list*) provided information about beliefs related to the school, certain pedagogical programmes, the effectiveness of different organizational forms and the competence operated by the teachers as well as opinions concerning the relationship with parents, the relations within the school, the possibilities of Roma children's development and identification with negative ethnic stereotypes.

The results of the research

The institutions

Although there is a general tendency to improve educational offers, HEFOP schools are more active in this respect. At the same time, it turned out that schools start specialized classes *in addition to the integration programme* and in some of the schools we can find programmes which may facilitate the implementation of *segregative solutions* in education organization.

The proportion of producing significant added value in the schools performing HEFOP innovations compared to those performing traditional innovations is five to one. The ratio is two to one in towns compared to villages. As added value is basically produced in classroom situations and results can be extremely different in different schools, the influence of a good teacher may be significant. This possible explanation is supported by some large sample quantitative analyses of panel data made in some foreign countries (Kertesi – Kézdi, 2005). According to the results of the research *the first part of my hypothesis proved true, while the second part did not*, as I did not manage to verify that more disadvantaged students get into secondary schools providing leaving certificate from schools carrying out innovations in accordance with HEFOP.

There is a difference between the head-teachers of HEFOP and non-HEFOP schools in terms of how important they consider the development of students' competence in their schools, however this difference is not significant. At the same time, *the head-teachers of town schools consider the development of students' competence in their school significantly more important than the head-teachers of village schools.*

The teachers

The research shows that *the number of teachers having obtained another degree is higher in schools performing HEFOP innovations and the number of teachers pursuing studies is higher in schools which are able to produce added value.* It means that teachers working in HEFOP schools and in schools producing added value *increase their cultural capital*, while their school invest in human resources when they support the studies of the teachers.

The research also shows clearly that *schools improving human resources effectively have better results as far as the development of students' competence*

is concerned. Most of the teachers participating in IPR trainings and trainings related to integration and skills development are from schools producing significant added value.

The first half of my second hypothesis proved true as follows. When examining the applied strategies and methods I found that *teachers working in the HEFOP innovation schools apply drama pedagogy, role play, simulation, cooperative learning and team work significantly more frequently* than their colleagues in working in school performing traditional innovations. These strategies and methods outline a system of tools operated in non-traditional pedagogical culture. This culture can be considered student centered as it focuses on students' activities. This picture might be the result of intentions to live up to the expectations. This possibility cannot be precluded as I obtained indirect (and not direct) information through the questionnaires. It could be controlled to some extent when asking questions about rating and preferences. The information obtained in connection with the rating of pedagogical tools confirms that participation in innovation trainings and other *studies* as well as obtaining an additional degree *result in a positive change of the views related to elements like games or project pedagogy.* The question follows: *Who studies more?* The research shows that *teachers working in HEFOP schools study more.* They spend more time participating in trainings, they apply the tools of student centered pedagogical culture, they are more open-minded and they prefer methods based on students' activities. Their classroom or even other types of activities have a tendency to produce more added pedagogical value and certainly play an essential role in the appearance of significant added value. It means that they acquire important knowledge.

The pedagogical attributions connected to the reasons for students' school success can be classified in two groups. I put explanations attributing school success to external (environmental) reasons. *In accordance with my expectation formulated in the second half of my third hypothesis, only the minority of teachers belong to this group and most of them are from schools performing traditional innovations.* Their actual proportion is higher than I expected; it is well over 20%. *In accordance with my expectation formulated in the first part of my third hypothesis the majority of teachers attribute students' school success primarily to professional (That is internal and organizational) reasons.* We can distinguish some sub-groups within this attribution type: attributions that can be considered *only just professional, professional* attributions considered *domi-*

nantly internal and internal attributions emphasizing social competence. External attribution related to students' school success definitely reflects the teachers' underrating of their own effectiveness and the lack of professional self-respect.

In accordance with my expectation, the significant majority, nearly two thirds of the teachers *explain students' unsuccess with external reasons*, in compliance with the self-service attribution model. These results have *proved the statement in the first part of the fourth hypothesis*. In contrast with the statement about the HEFOP innovation group in hypothesis 4.2, according to which they attribute unsuccess more frequently to internal reasons, I was not able to find significant relations between the innovation groups and the choice of attributions. It means that *groups formed on the basis of which innovation group the teachers belong to do not show statistically significant divergence*. It can be stated that while *the first part of the fourth hypothesis proved to be true, the second part did not*. That is we cannot say that HEFOP teachers face the internal, professional reasons for students' unsuccess in a higher degree. Moreover, the classifications according to the type of settlement, gender, position or whether the added value was significant or a tendency did not indicate significant relations either.

On the evidence of the average rate of acceptance of the total false beliefs (calculated from the rate of acceptance of the single false beliefs) the majority of the teachers agreed with the false beliefs related to the development of Roma children. The results indicate that *the majority (51.4%) of the teachers from schools performing HEFOP innovations reject the statement that Roma parents do not educate their children*, while this rate is 37.5% in the case of teachers from schools performing traditional innovations. The type of the settlement provided a better forecast for the dependent variable and on the grounds of that we can state that *teachers working in village schools rejected the given false belief in a higher proportion*. The expectation that teachers from schools performing HEFOP innovations will mostly reject false beliefs, which contain group stereotypes as well and cannot be proved pedagogically, came true only partially, at a rate of one fifth. That is *the second part of my fifth hypothesis did not prove true*.

The statement that *'Roma children have little motivation to learn'* received the highest acceptance, which is significant forecast to the acceptance of the statements *'Roma children's linguistic abilities are insufficient, they need compensating, remedial classes'* and *'Roma parents do not educate their children*

and as a result, their cognitive development is not ensured by the family'. As the significant connection of the acceptance and rejection of the statements and false beliefs with the attributions of success and unsucess can be analyzed with the help of cross-section tables and by means of applying relevant statistics, the central elements and the inner structure of the system of explanations representing self-service distortion made up from the false beliefs can be described as well. It may promote defining the methodological and organizational focal points of trainings aiming at the development of teachers' competence.

The teachers in favour of school integration are the ones from the schools producing significant added value, from the *HEFOP innovation group* and from the group of the head-teachers. *This result proves my statement in the fifth hypothesis about the teachers' judgement of integration. Thus we can state that I managed to prove the first part of the fifth hypothesis.* At the same time nearly three thirds of the supporters (74.6%) consider compensation in remedial classes more effective. – Anyway, the absolute majority of teachers are in favour of the idea of compensation in remedial classes, but this support is significantly weaker among head-teachers and village teachers, unlike in the HEFOP group, which I found a bit surprising.

The *teachers of HEFOP schools* feel more capable of becoming a member of a wider professional community, participating in professional development and promoting their students' development through establishing a safe learning environment than teachers of schools performing traditional innovations. Furthermore, the *teachers participating in further trainings related to HEFOP innovations* feel significantly more capable of establishing an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual trust with their students, applying new information technologies, finding a balance of controlling and assisting the students as well as learning and applying processes of school diagnostics. On the other hand, the teachers agreeing with the false beliefs feel a lot more capable of controlling and teaching their subjects. The ones accepting that Roma children are not capable of abstract thinking surely cannot enthuse over their own subjects and their students' development in these subjects than the ones who reject this idea. Thus we can state *in connection with my expectation in the second hypothesis that HEFOP teachers feel more capable of implementing competence which can be considered as part of the student centered pedagogical culture. Consequently, the second part of my second hypothesis proved true.*

This group of teachers seem to have moved away from the 'traditional' pedagogical culture.

Further considerations

The findings of my research have shown that student centered pedagogical practice and producing significant added value are more characteristic of the group performing HEFOP innovations. I also consider the exploration and presentation of the fact that teachers performing effective practice have a different way of thinking about a number of questions an important result of the study. Such questions are integration and segregation, the education of Roma children, their own roles and competence or the reasons for students' success and unsuccess. In the background of the alternative thinking of these teachers we can find essential factors like different and more complex experiences related to organizational and practical questions as well as more formal training.

My research certainly raises several questions which can be subjected to further examination. In my view, the most important of these problems are the in-depth exploration of 'good practices' and the research and development possibilities of trainings promoting effectiveness. In connection with that, I believe it would be necessary to observe classroom and extracurricular pedagogical practices and to describe and analyze the individual practices of teachers working successfully with disadvantaged children. The results could be used primarily in trainings for teachers educating disadvantaged and Roma children. But we must remember that no trainings can evade the exploration of teachers' beliefs, questioning the false beliefs and laying the foundations of new structures of thinking for the sake of teachers' renewal. It requires the promotion of forming new structures of knowledge from the trainers, which can only be realized in a complex mutual learning process. Research results are indispensable in this process in order to be able to offer successful practical alternatives, new constructions and to provide inspiration and motivation.

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