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DEBTS TO BE PAID IN 21ST CENTURY HUNGARIAN EDUCATION

Abstract:

The practice of pedagogy in the third millennium is struggling to overcome shortcomings that have been reiterated by many, ones that still appear to be insurmountable in spite of tremendous efforts made to remedy them, including issues such as the efficiency of schools, the transparency of education, the shortcomings of professional pedagogy, the relations network of schools and their users, early drop-outs and dealing with social disadvantages. Are these anomalies still outstanding debts for contemporary pedagogy to pay?

□The objective of this study is to put Hungarian efforts in education in a European context just over a decade after EU accession and to identify areas requiring immediate action and to analyse such areas from social, economic and pedagogical aspects. We wish to highlight problem areas to draw the attention of not only the theoretical and practicing experts in the international pedagogy community but also the attention of decision-makers to these issues, thus taking a step closer to tackling these problems.

Keywords:

shortcomings of education; efficiency of education; accountability of education; teachers' professionalism; equal opportunities.

JEL Classification: I21

Hypotheses and research methodology

The specific characteristics of a nation's education can hardly be understood without looking at the responses it gave to historical and direct environmental impacts. Therefore we shall assume that *education in Hungary, even after a decade of EU membership, still bears the characteristics of the era before the changing of the political system in 1989 and is struggling to cope with the challenges of the third millennium.*

The other hypothesis of the study is that *hasty and less than well thought-out measures in education and the slow and clumsy renewal of the pedagogical profession are both major obstacles to the modernisation of pedagogy in the 21st century.*

As a research method we opted for reviewing European and Hungarian research results published in the past 10 years and analysing the literature such results prompted, knowing fully well that doing so will draw strong criticism to this study for falling far too much on the theoretical side. Nonetheless, we firmly believe that *such complex a topic can be better explored by analysing documents, giving more information to the reader, thus providing a more realistic overview than empirical research could by coming up with answers to a not necessarily representative survey.*

Hungarian schools in the EU

From the 1990s on in most European countries education and training has been given priority as the link between the society and the economy, developing the human resources available. Because ideas such as 'European knowledge', 'a learning society', supporting integration processes' 'economic recovery' and 'social cohesion' were identified as necessary and desirable, the demand for quality education was pushed in the focus. (Buchberger, Campos, Kallós and Stephenson 2000, 11)

The way we regard education depends to a great extent on *the efficiency of schools, the level of education in society and the prestige of teaching as a career.* How successful is Hungarian education in tackling the challenges of the third millennium? To answer that question, let us first consider some typical indicators with European data.

The efficiency of education

We often point out some of the great achievements of Hungarian education, but it comes under criticism even more often. It is praised for outstanding achievements in fostering talents, since it has given the world a number of Nobel laureates (e.g. SZENT-GYÖRGYI Albert, OLÁH György, KERTÉSZ Imre, etc.), eminent inventors and ingenious scientists, including brilliant musicians as well (e.g. LISZT Ferenc, BARTÓK Béla and KODÁLY Zoltán). Another positive fact about Hungarian education is that it was able to achieve such results amidst century-long or world shattering political fights (wars, revolutions and regimes coming and going) with the environmental and infrastructural conditions constantly deteriorating, let alone improving. Although it is shaken now and then, Hungary has been insisting on its special 8+4 class system for over a century now, thus putting off the early selection of pupils. Its major achievements in natural sciences, for instance, were noted at prestigious and authoritative institutes even 30 years ago (IEA 1984 IN: Báthory 1992). This practically ends the list of its merits to give way to criticism.

Hungarian education has done a lot in harnessing and nurturing talents, but it did so with a rather Prussian approach and traditions, in a rigid and wasteful structure.

Efficient education can be described by the efficiency and the reasonable, economic operation of schools. To give you an idea about the efficiency of Hungarian education, let us have a look at data from the latest PISA surveys (Table 1). Results between 2000 and 2006 showed a slight improvement in the performance of Hungarian pupils. In 2009, however, they either scored the same as the OECD average in all areas (mathematics, reading comprehension and sciences) or did not significantly deviate from the average. Results deteriorated dramatically in 2012 when a significant drop in performance was shown in all areas as the negative deviation from the OECD average (20; 12; 10 points difference) was regarded as significant (Balázsi et al, 2013).

Table 1
Performance of Hungarian schools in PISA surveys
(OECD- PISA, 2004; 2009; 2012; Felvégi, 2005; Balázsi, Ostorics and Szalay, 2008)

		<i>mathematics</i>	<i>reading</i>	<i>science</i>
2000 (32 countries)	OECD Percentage	---	500	---
	Hungary	---	480*	---
2003 (41 countries)	OECD Percentage	500	494	500
	Hungary	490*	482*	503
2006 (57 countries)	OECD average	498	492	500
	Hungary	491*	482*	504
2009 (66 countries)	OECD average	496	493	501
	Hungary	490	494	503
2012 (65 countries)	OECD average	494	496	501
	Hungary	477*	488*	494*

**Significant deviation*

The efficiency of our schools, therefore, is sadly not proven by current data. In this respect Hungary still has a great deal to do (Lannert 2004) including key areas such as the renewal of teaching as a profession (Csapó 2008), facilitating the closing of the social gap and eliminating social disadvantages in schools (Réthy 2013), increasing the pupil per teacher ratio and reducing education costs (Lannert 2004).

In the development of Hungarian education the period around the changing of the political system can be considered as a watershed because as Kelemen (2009) puts it: 'In a transitional period it offered values one could sign up to by supporting an education policy breaking down previous taboos (eliminating state monopoly on schools, the freedom of founding and maintaining a school, doing away with a rigid school system and structure, the renewal of curricula and the abolition of the mandatory Russian classes).' (p. 510).

Vargáné (2000) compares the two kinds of personalities produced by the (authority-based, restricting, directive-based, closed and teacher focused) Prussian and the ones produced by a free, liberal, plural, child-focused education that operates under the aegis of self-fulfilment to conclude that ‘... In Eastern parts the mass of people without a purpose in life is assumed to be larger and there are more suicides’, [...] but ‘Western youth is also plagued by similar conditions although for different reasons’ (p. 85). The fundamental difference between the two sets of values is that the Prussian one produces ‘executing’ personalities whereas the other one releases ‘autonomous’ personalities. If we can agree that ‘liberalism is inversely proportional to the length of central curricula’ (Horváth 1998 IN: Vargáné 2000, 85) and that these two different models can by no means be consolidated, then we can safely say that the developments in present-day education suggest the ideal of an ‘autonomous-executing’ personality as the goal. *We want to raise self-fulfilling, constructive democrats and not necessarily servile, but very much rule abiding, well-informed and open personalities at the very same time.* Well, pedagogical sciences still owe us a single description of this paradigm to this day (Mihály 1998 IN: Vargáné 2000, 85).

Analyses of the school system (traditionally 8+4 classes) suggest that no root-and-branch changes have taken place in this structure up and running since the 1950s. The underlying reason is that the newly established local governments meaning independent municipalities were determined to maintain institutions of education on their own as a token of their independence, which simply did not enable the separation of different levels of education (lower and higher grades) or that they would be maintained by different entities. It seems also highly likely that for the thousands of newly-formed municipalities taking responsibility in education issues and maintaining their schools on their own was also an immensely motivating factor, a token of their much-fought for independence (Halász 2000).

Although no total structural change took place in Hungarian education, we have seen attempts made. Changes in the past few decade triggered major changes both horizontally as well as vertically. We can see this when looking at the role of so-called structure-reforming schools proclaimed to be the flagships of quality education (6 and 8 class secondary grammar schools) or when we take a closer look at old-and-new types of institutions of secondary vocational training (vocational secondary schools, vocational schools and technical secondary school), along with special schools or special skills development schools, both newcomers in the education arena in the past 25 years.

A number studies point out that *Hungarian education is wasteful* (Liskó 1998; Kertesi 2008; Lannert 2010) though they tend to approach both the essence and the extent of wasteful management. Most studies seem to focus on the number of schools and the number of pupils, staff headcount and the number of pupils, the share of the cost of education in the national budget and efficiency. This is done mostly to ensure the accountability of schools, an increasingly pressing issue. Soft accountability is informative without sanctions or rewards, while rigorous accountability imposes strict sanctions on schools underperforming for an extended period of time (Davison et al 2002).

Considering the fact that we are talking about a sector of the economy ‘with an annual budget of about HUF 500-600 billion’ operating an extensive network of ‘5000 institutions of education’ employing some ‘160,000 teachers’, setting up a system of analysis providing reliable data on efficient (successful and reasonable) operation is a most pressing and unavoidable issue (Kertesi 2008,167).

Education costs expressed in the sector's share in the national GDP do not show specific costs per pupil, therefore comparing them can only lead to superficial conclusions (Figure 1). The intention of governments to take action can, however, be clearly seen from the data, since the share of education in the national budget is a clear indication of just how important education is compared with other sectors.

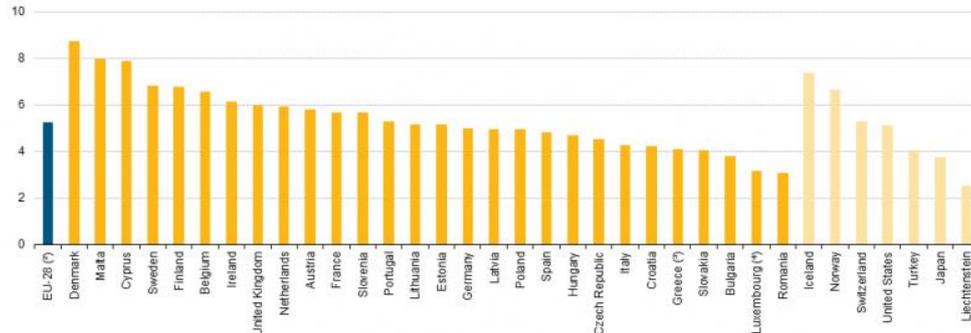


Figure 1
Public expenditure on education, 2011 (% of GDP; Eurostat 2015)

Palotás and Jankó (2010) highlight 'problems of sustainability and cost-efficiency resulting from a mismatch between demographic processes and the intuitions', which were going to be remedied by thinking afresh about normative funding and the state's role and by attempts to reform schools in the second decade of the century. Key factors in accountability are (Horn 2011) '...publicity, feedback and encouragement' (p. 5). *Publicity* means providing school users with accurate and true information to help them make informed decisions as to in which school they wish to use education services. *Feedback* means an information system for the schools themselves about their own operations and about the comparison of the quality of service they provide against the quality available at other similar institutions. Finally, *encouragement* means that the school providing the service has a clear understanding of its quality indicators so that it is subsequently in a position to make a difference in the quality factors and becomes efficient by doing so.

In addition to the mandatory disclosure obligation of institutions and maintaining their external relations, *publicity* (providing information to those outside the institution) is mostly restricted to the number of pupils or to measures taken to improve the quality of infrastructure. The priority level of these issue changes now and then but they invariably fail to satisfy the demand for adequate information on behalf of those using the service, e.g. *the principles applied when allocating pupils into groups, methods of assessment and evaluation or the rules concerning their individual progress*. In plain English, the greatly desired glass school has not been invented as yet, true partnership is badly missing and it is a common practice for parents and schools to point the finger at each other.

The problem with *transparency* goes hand in hand with the special nature internal information flow. Horizontally and/or vertically severely disrupted structural communication is all too common. *Modern tools of sharing information* are either totally absent from the daily routine or are underdeveloped or *not used extensively*. Although the (external and internal) information channels of the heads of institutions do function well, not every information reaches their subordinate teachers. This can be clearly seen in how well (or not) informed colleagues are even in systemic matters affecting them personally.

Horizontal professional communication is also clumsy since this is based on high levels of expertise. Without reliable feedback, which was definitely not a common practice for a long time in Hungarian public education, professional uncertainty is only increasing.

(Re-) *nationalising* schools in 2012 and strengthening management from regional levels, from county government offices and educational districts have opened new horizons and have presented new challenges. Replacing the previous local municipality management, centralisation 'eradicates schools' problem solving capacities' (Radó 2013, 14), which is likely to cause a decline in the institutions' dedication to the quality of education. Triggering heated debates, the state's maintenance centre (KLIK) and the operating anomalies of the educational districts have come under fire from the moment on they were established.

The *efficiency of schools* can be shown not only by publishing cost figures but also by an integrated analysis of the composition and the use of the human resources and the results. Analysts suggest that a combination of the two available measuring models (cross-section and added value model) could be the answer since applying either of the two on its own will inevitably lead to distortions. The cross-section model will give you an idea about *performance and current costs* at a given point in time, whereas the added value model can better reflect the impact of *innate competences and of previous investments* in the test results. The typical problems of the competence assessment system in place to ensure accountability arise from the fact that a) some of the school focus so much on measuring and assessing that *other pedagogical tasks are pushed down in the pecking order*, b) in the surveys *a relatively small change in the number of pupils in a school with low pupil headcount will greatly affect results*, c) *sometimes results are manipulated at schools*, and d) *institutions of significantly different sizes have significantly different chances of improving or deteriorating their results* (Kertesi 2008).

One of the tasks to be tackled in the near future is to put in place a measurement system satisfying all 'customer requirements' in public education, a system in which the responsibility for quality is not fragmented any more (among national, regional, local and school levels) but is borne spread across a 'national and decentralised' structure (Palotás and Jankó 2010, 70).

Professionalism in teaching

Making professionalism a general rule is not very far from the need for accountability. This is about rethinking the classic idea of a teacher's *role* as an officer, about pinpointing more precisely exactly what a *teacher's competences* are as a result of which the teacher is given ultimate responsibility for the quality of education. Such competences should include the ability to constantly renew a teacher's set of roles, which can be regarded as a professional response given to the increasing number of challenges and manifesting itself in an equally enhancing repertoire of activities. Referring to a number of studies Sági and Varga (2010) say that the teacher him/herself has a far greater impact in the efficiency of learning than the physical elements of the learning environment. To ensure efficient teaching it is imperative to '*employ capable and competent teachers with a solid professional background and to make sure that they stay in the long run*' (p. 295).

Experienced also internationally, the increased levels of *teacher shortage* is a typical problem at disadvantaged places. The demand for quality teachers, however,

seems to be widespread. The first and most crucial step in creating quality professionalism is *to restore the prestige of teaching as a career*. To do so and thus remedy the acute shortage of teachers, Hungarian education policy chooses to deal with by *introducing innovations* both in public and in higher education *simultaneously*. Abandoning the former Bologna system in favour of teacher training in a single system (2013) was a step taken to make teaching attractive for *those with specific career ideas*, while in public education the reform of *teachers' career plan* has been designed to keep people on the job.

Although the (two-tier teacher training 2006-2013) Bologna system continued to put young people off teaching as a career, but the root causes of the teacher shortage in Hungary go way further back, probably to the time of the changing of the political system. At the time certain economic sectors (industry, trade and finances) suddenly boomed allowing the quality of life of those employed in these sectors to improve spectacularly. Given the unfortunate demographic changes at the time resulting in a great number of schools to be closed down or integrated into another institution and in dismissing large numbers of teachers, *the image of teaching as a career has been radically changing in youngsters*. While teaching used to mean a solid job and a secure livelihood for decades, by the beginning of the 21st century it became an *insecure, badly paid job with low social prestige* and increased work load, thus proving the theory right that only the truly dedicated ones with a calling opt for teaching as a career.

On repeatedly introducing a single-tier teacher training scheme in 2013 a mandatory aptitude test was also re-introduced as part of the entrance examinations. The three-part included a *motivation letter*, a *conversation* based on the letter and the *discussion of an educational situation*. A survey aimed at pinpointing the first experiences suggests that, on the basis of responses from 118 respondents in 13 institutions of higher education, in 2013 less than 20 applicants were turned down in altogether 7 institutions for reasons including hearing impairment, mental-psychic disorders and a fuzzy or vague future vision (Sági and Nikitscher 2014). In order to have an idea what these figures actually mean, we need to know the total number of aptitude tests carried out at the institutions. We can find the answer in a study by Ercsei (2014) that clearly say that 'in 2013 as part of a normal procedure a total of 1,331 first-round applicants were registered at 39 faculties of 17 institutions, which figure will grow if we add subsequent applications, totalling 4,732 applicants registered' (p. 77) and that '1,298 applicants were actually accepted from the total' (p. 78).

One of the methods used at the aptitude test is the *motivation conversation* which, as experienced by panel members, is believed to have been effective in screening gross cases of inaptitude due to the great subjectivity involved. A benefit of such a conversation is, however, that it makes the applicant verbalise his/her career ideas and provides an opportunity for would-be students and tutors to meet. Also, experts say that this method could potentially be transformed into an input indicator (Sági and Nikitscher 2014).

Introducing a single-tier teacher training regime may attract more applicant, we might be actually creating another problem, namely 'a rival to [Bologna-type] bachelor degree programmes' (Imre and Kállai 2014, 101) among applicant without specific career ideas. The lesson learnt in the 1990s when teacher training was regarded as an 'easy way to get a degree', thus strengthening the already adverse selection in the profession, which would be in flagrant contradiction to the original aim.

The new teachers' career plan was designed with the aim to help keep first and foremost 'quality teachers' in the profession. The official document says that the career plan '...is a guarantee to enhance the quality of teacher's work, ensures employment security, allows a merit-based differentiation in remuneration and can strengthen teachers' commitment to their own professional development. The key element of the career plan is a quality rating system made up of professionally justified components, procedures and methodology, thus functioning as a guarantee for high teaching standards and teaching quality.'" (Antalné et al 2013, 13)

Based on teachers' competences as specified in the relevant national regulation and on a both domestic and international professional consensus, the new Hungarian rating system takes into account the professional self-assessment of the teachers themselves (reflections), critical observations by external experts (advisors and rating experts) and the findings of a rating committee to an equal (1/3) extent. The Government Decree 326/2013. (VIII. 30) provides for the actual contents of a rating procedure stipulating that (irrespective of the maintaining entity) all teachers employed in public education are subject to the rating system. For the various levels, the criteria and the waiting periods between levels, see Table 2.

Table 2
Career and remuneration plan for teachers
Government Decree 326/2013. [VIII. 30.]

<i>Level</i>	<i>Waiting period and the time of the next rating exam/procedure</i>	<i>Contents and assessment criteria of the rating exam, criteria to be upgraded</i>
<i>Trainee</i>	at least 2yrs Examination in the last month of the trainee period or in June the given academic year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) subject-specific teachers' degree b) visiting and analysing at least two subject-specific classes or sessions, c) review and assessment of the portfolio (defending the portfolio, professional self-assessment) d) documents of professional controls e) documents of self-assessment of the school itself f) minimum performance of 60 % performance
<i>Teacher I</i>	6 yrs in practice, own initiative, 9 yrs in practice by law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) visiting and analysing at least two subject-specific classes or sessions, b) review and assessment of the portfolio (defending the portfolio,

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c) professional self-assessment) c) minimum performance of 75 %
Teacher II		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) certification exam b) visiting and analysing at least two subject-specific classes or sessions, c) review and assessment of the portfolio (defending the portfolio, professional self-assessment))
Master teacher		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) at least 6 yrs' practice as Teacher II b) expert, professional advisor, mentor c) curriculum development, researcher
Researcher teacher		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) at least 2 successful qualification procedure b) research and publication activity or c) completion of a doctoral degree programme

In accordance with the regulation above there are two ways for teacher to progress in this system; a) by a successful *certification examination*, closing the trainee period and b) by a *qualification procedure*, allowing teachers to switch between the categories.

Teachers starting their careers will receive help from a mentor at his/her school, appointed by the head of the school. The mentor is supposed to help the colleague find his/her place within the staff, coordinate their professional development as part of which mentors introduce them to the basic documents regulating the functioning of the school, visit their classes and assist them throughout their preparation for the certification examination. For the flowchart, see Figure 2.

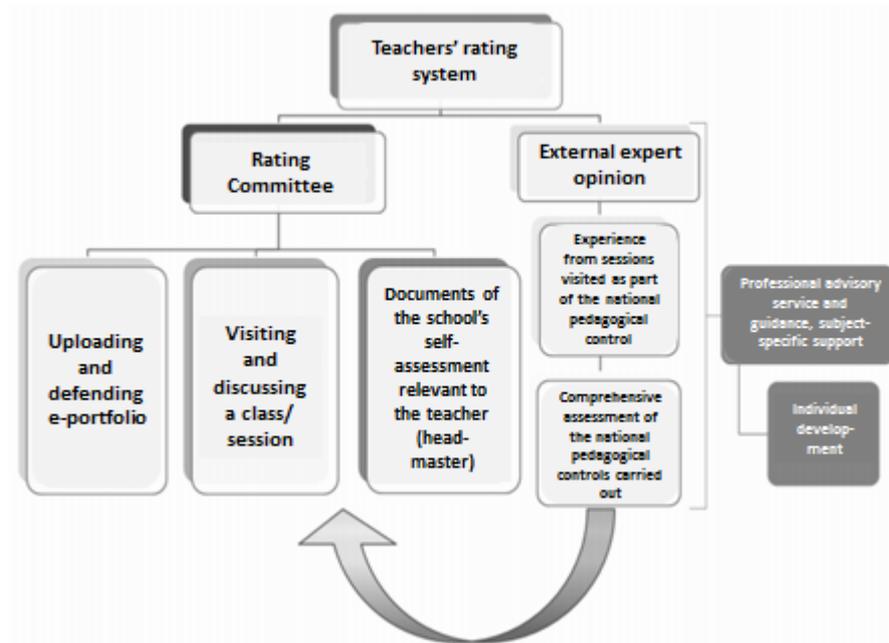


Figure 2
Teachers' rating system
(Antalné et al 2013, 18)

Portfolios are core documents at the heart of the rating procedure (Figure 2). As required by legislation teachers are to submit and as part of their portfolios a *professional CV*, *documentation of their teaching-educating work* (flow-charts of 10 subject-specific classes/sessions, accompanied by subsequent notes), documents showing *pedagogical and other activities*, documents attesting to their *independent creative and artistic activities*, a *brief overview of the institution* employing the teacher as well as an *assessment of their professional careers*. The rating committee will assess the chronological development of the candidate's competences.

At the certification exam or qualifying procedure the rating committee may award 50% to the applicant's professional history and portfolio, 30% to the quality of the class (session) held and 20% to the quality of the documents accompanying the classes/sessions. Similar proportions apply when it comes to aspiring master or researcher teachers, but in their case experience by expert or advisor controls play a more decisive role (see Annex 1 of Government Decree 326/2013. VIII. 30). The procedure is practically based on indicators. 'Indicators are forms of competence manifesting in knowledge, skills and attitudes, visible through activities that can be perceived by an external observer during their work as teachers.' (Antalné et al 2013, 29) Each competence is described by 10 indicators to assess whether or not the applicant does possess the given competence and if yes, to what extent. Trainees are expected to score at least 60% to get upgraded to Teacher I, and applicant aspiring category Teacher II have to score at least 75% (Table 2).

One can truly understand why one of the greatest and most revolutionary innovations of today's education policy i.e. *the first wave of teacher rating* and its lessons are met with heightened expectations. The rating plan for 2016 allows some 30

thousand teachers to enter the system, one year on the application deadline in April 2015. The extremely long waiting period might be an advantage for *those subject to a mandatory certification procedure* (trainees or teachers with long years of practice or ones upgraded to Teacher II temporarily), but is definitely a disadvantage to applicants aspiring higher categories such as *Master Teacher* or *Researcher Teacher* simply because they are the professionals who meet all mandatory and statutory requirements anyway, since they have spent quite some time on the job and have used all opportunities for development without being told to do so. They are the people who acquired additional degrees and certificates, thus acting as a driving force among their peers. The one-year preparation period is practically pointless as coming up with a portfolio is not so much of a challenge for younger teachers than for those who acquired their teacher's degree in the old system. It seems highly likely, though, that those theoretically qualifying for being a Master Teacher have not passed the special examination qualifying them for their tasks as *mentors*, as specified in the invitation for rating applications in 2016. Experience so far suggests that the geographical location of the teacher training institutions has had a massive impact on the popularity of the course, since the contents will help candidates ready themselves for assisting public education trainees. For their rather practical content, the specialisations public education management and development pedagogy have always been very popular, so you'll find a relatively large number of colleagues with such qualifications.

The legislator's intention to give *priority to the colleagues* who mentor trainees when it comes to *upgrading them to Master Teacher* seems in many ways justified. Less so, however, when the intention is to make them function as an administrative barrier filtering eligible applicants with public finances in mind.

Being *classified as a Researcher Teacher* hinges upon a scientific degree 'relating to pedagogical activities' (Ministry for National Resources [EMMI] 2015). Exactly what the legislator had in mind is not quite clear, not even from the information brochures of the Office for Education (Office for Education [OH] 2015). Take, for instance, the rating/qualification of teachers of geography in secondary schools, their degree comes most of the time from their subject-specific disciplinary like biology, geography, mathematics, linguistics, etc. Even if the colleague does have a higher degree, his/her degree is practically bound not to have anything to do with teaching methodology (pedagogy). Such aspects are not a mandatory part of a PhD thesis, not even when the candidate works in public education. Dissertations with a pedagogical aspect are written mostly in pedagogical doctoral schools and the authors are typically experts in background institutions of higher education, research or education management. It seems therefore more than reasonable to *clarify the exact meaning of this criterion as soon as possible* and make it publically available to potential applicants.

Equal opportunities

Equal opportunities in pedagogy do not simply mean providing opportunities but rather ensuring that opportunities are exploited to the full. Accordingly, the strategic, education-related goals of European Union to be reached until 2020 include the reduction of early drop-out rates and increasing the rate of young people completing third level education (Roth and Thum 2010).

Equal opportunities is a frequent idea not only in the literature but also in everyday life, reminding us of the 'desegregation' of social groups at risk of social exclusion. Segregation, the artificial separation of various social groups has been known in countless forms: based on sex, age, income, language, religion, colour, taste or location. Whether individually or collectively motivated or induced by economic processes, separation is separation without a sharp dividing line. That said, it has been proven that individuals land in some of them by their own choices, while others depend on others' judgement. Schelling (1971) modelled the various types of social separation on a mathematical-statistical basis, and also the mobility willingness of minorities. Although he carried out his research using limited sampling, Schelling says that 'elements of his model seem suitable to be extended to a social scale [...] minorities, for instance, with their relative sizes shrinking, are likely to separate themselves more clearly from the majority' (p. 143).

These days we tend to talk about separation rather than segregation, mostly because discrimination is still not uncommon but the '*pedagogy of fairness*' (Réthy 2013, 42) as part of social development is slowly but steadily creating the prerequisites of accepting difference and otherness, as well as living democratically side by side, consequently pushing trends towards creating equal opportunities.

In Hungary children's rights are protected in applicable legislation from 1991 on, whereas the principle of equal opportunities is provided for in Act CXXV of 2005 on the promotion of equal treatment and equal opportunities and in the Government Decree 321/2011. (XII. 27) on the equal opportunities mentors. Under this regulation 'everyone must be treated with equal respect and care, with due and equal consideration of individual specifics'. The violation of these rules, 'discrimination, indirect discrimination harassment, unlawful separation, revenge and instruction to such actions' entails criminal liability in criminal law. Thanks to the very same regulation each and every entity, including businesses and public institutions as well must have an equal opportunities plan in place. The experts of the Equal Opportunities Authority check both the contents of and compliance with such plans as part of a public administration procedure, and controls are also carried out by the ombudsman of fundamental rights.

The number of people belonging to extremely marginalised groups in Hungary is estimated to account for about 700,000 people by Havas (2008), people who re-produce their own disadvantages through generations to come. Although schools have no right or powers whatsoever to discriminate against or separate pupils on the basis of their origins, disabilities or social status, one can still clearly see phenomena suggesting intolerance such as a) the pedagogical standards of the institution, b) Roma segregation, c) teachers' negative attitudes and d) family traditions of selecting schools (Havas 2008, 121-122).

The latest statistics suggest that the rate of at-risk (HH) and multiply at-risk (HHH) pupils has dropped significantly after 2010 (Figure 3). Considering, however, the stricter legal definition it is safe to say that there has been no significant change in the rate of at-risk pupils or in the rate of early drop-outs.

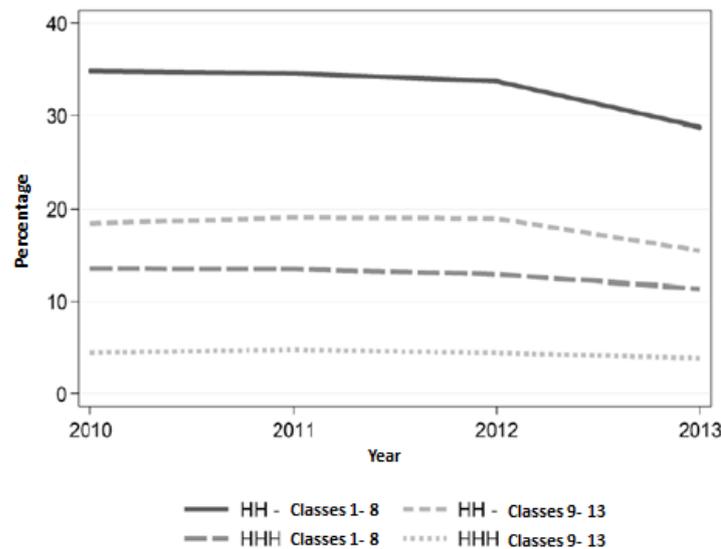


Figure 3

Rate of at-risk pupils (HH) and multiply at-risk pupils (HHH)
(Hajdu T., Hermann Z., Horn D. and Varga J. 2015, 14)

Hajdu et al (2015) used a *segregation index* to show to what extent *potential contacts between at-risk and not at-risk pupils* are doomed to failure due to separation at school. They found that 'The national *segregation index* showed a *slight increase* between 2010 and 2013. The segregation index calculated on the basis of at-risk pupils grew from 27.2 in 2010 to 32.9 in 2013, while the same index calculated on the basis of multiply at-risk pupils grew from 29.2 to 34 during the same period.' (p. 156) Institutional education is unable to improve equal opportunities indices enough to reduce disadvantages. In certain regions, for instance, the increasing number of kindergarten places did not improve the overall situation of the most-deprived families, school selection, however, makes it even worse (Havas, Kemény and Liskó 2002; Havas and Liskó 2006).

According to official EU figures the rate of under-educated person decreased by 18 % points to 14.4 % in 2009 from the corresponding figure in 2000 (Eurydice 2010, 5-6.). The same figure in Hungary decreased from 13.6% in 2000 to 10.8% in 2011 (Central Office for Statistics = KSH, 2011), which would be encouraging unless we take the impacts of lowering the age limit for compulsory education in 2012. Lowering the age limit from 18 years to 16 will, of course, improve the rate of early school drop-outs but will inevitably raise unemployment figures.

To reduce the rate of early drop-outs from schools school below 10% by 2020 in the EU the Council of Ministers have agreed in as early as 2001 to make further efforts (EACEA 2014, 7-8). Referring to data from the academic year 2013/2014 the document (p. 19) says that in the EU28 the rate of early drop-outs was reduced from 14.2% in 2009 to 12.0 in 2014 (p. 24). At the same time the rate increased in Hungary from 11.2% in 2009 to 11.8% in 2014 (*ibid.*) Figures seem to suggest that both the lowered age limit for compulsory education and the public labour programme, so-called 'bridge' scheme failed to make a difference on the positive side at the time of the survey.

Adding a pedagogical aspect to the socio-economic view of being at-risk will leave us with a much larger group of pupils in the population, which is particularly justified both from the individuals' point of view and for social development as such. The fact that

1we consider a child to be at-risk each and every case the situation of the child puts him/her in more difficult circumstances than the average regarding his/her personal and academic development, achieving desired levels of schools performance and school life quality' (Réthy and Vámos 2006, 11) is a clear attestation to the significance of pedagogy in dealing with at-risk children. A pedagogy that is free of prejudice, that is, a fair and professional pedagogy is in a position to provide equal opportunities for every pupil, thus contributing to social integration. *Creating equal opportunities means, in this respect, not only providing pupils with opportunities but also preparing them actually making good use of these opportunities.*

Identifying *special educational needs (SEN)* and meeting them in schools presents yet another dilemma. Lacking a single European definition and regulation, the rate of pupils with SEN shows significant and striking variations across EU countries (Figure 4), which gives us an idea not only about the size of the population designated (stigmatised) as persons with disabilities but also about the rate of persons within the entire population receiving extra care from the state. A low rate of SEN pupils within the youngsters falling under the age limit of compulsory education and their high rate in extra state care indicates a society with a humane and inclusive attitude.

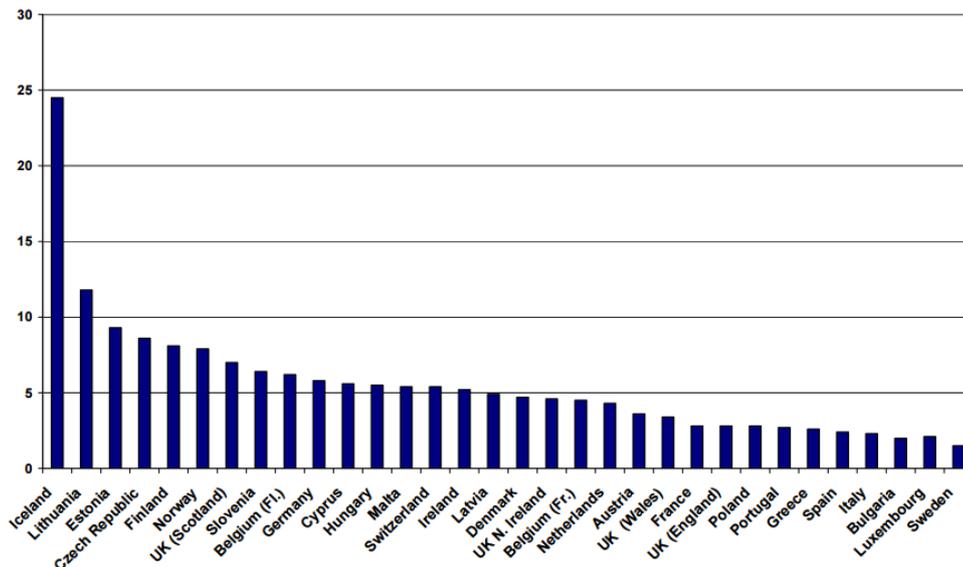


Figure 4

Pupils identified as having SEN in % of the total school population in selected European countries (NESSE 2012, 15)

In Hungary 6.9% of primary school pupils (ISCED 1 and 2) are classified as pupils with SEN (KSH, 2014).

Based on figures from 31 European countries 1.6% of the population under the age limit for compulsory education attends a segregated institution of education, while the same figure for Hungary is 2.6% (NESSE 2012, 15).

The chances of pupils with SEN are anything but reassuring, in spite of the increasingly wide scope of state support. Pupils starting primary school in a SEN class rarely have a chance to get back into a majority class. Completing their compulsory

education is a special school often proves to be a dead end, not mentioning the school's vested interest in identifying pupils with SEN (Havas 2008, 128).

The number of pupils diagnosed with SEN has been increasing in the past 10 years although diagnose criteria have been getting increasingly more rigorous leaving us with a 'rate of 3.6% in 2001 to 5.9% in 2013' (Hajdu et al 2015, 47). The academic year 2014/2015 saw further increase to the current 7% (KSH 2015, 1).

The increasing number of primary school pupils with SEN in majority classes (Figure 5) also suggest that an increasing number of public education institutions provide for pupils with SEN, which would be a good reason to be happy unless we look at negative experience such as deficient institutional and/or professional requirements, low levels of acceptance unveiled at the same time.

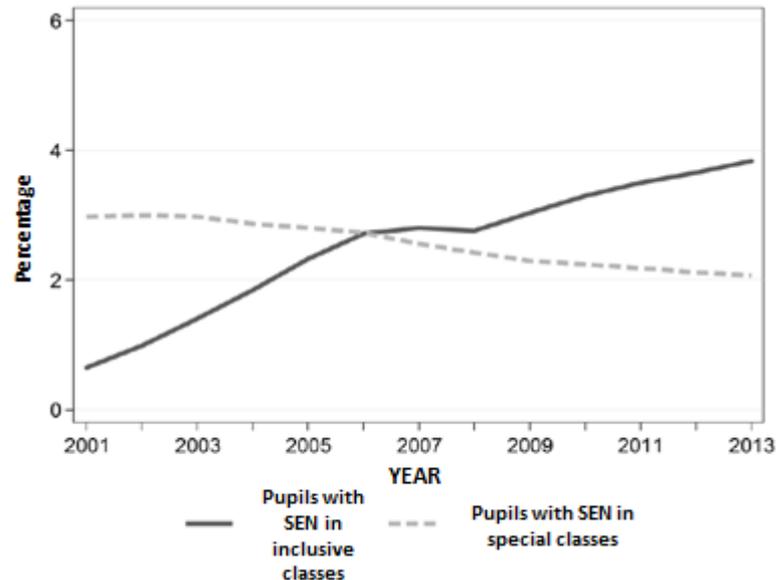


Figure 5.

Rate of primary school pupils with SEN in separate and integrated classes (Hajdu et al 2015, 163)

Latest figures from Hungary also show that (academic year 2012/2013) 66% of all pupils with SEN attend integrated classes with a majority curriculum (KSH, 2013), which is considerably better than the 53% in 2010 (Table 3).

Table 3

Number of pupils with SEN in integrated classes (figures from 31 countries). (Source: NESSE 2012, 15 and KSH, 2013)

	<i>Pupils total</i>	<i>Pupils with SEN total</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Pupils with SEN in segregated classes</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Pupils with SEN in inclusive setting</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Europe (2009)</i>	61,551,221	2,283,290	4	954,655	42	1,328,635	58
<i>Hungary (2010)</i>	1,275,365	70,747	6	33,014	47	37,733	53

A two-year period saw a 13% increase in the number of pupils with SEN attending integrated classes in Hungary, which is still below the European average a year before.

Conclusions

Having looked at a number of challenges education faces in the third millennium, this study concludes that the three issues where we feel there is a crying need to be addressed in order to make education efficient are *accountability, professionalism in pedagogy and equal opportunity for pupils*. We have described how efforts in Hungary have primarily been focused on making pedagogy professional, although since the changing of the political system there have been attempts to enhance the efficiency of schools and to make education accountable. The most important steps have been taken in the latter two areas but there is a long way to go to bring about positive changes. We have also pointed out that *education in Hungary is slow and clumsy to respond to changes even though it is indeed trying to meet European challenges*. When looking for explanations as to why or how this happened one should look at the often flagrantly contradicting measures in education policy in the past 25 years or so such as student assessment expressed in figures, lowering the age limit for compulsory education or the nearly constantly changing teacher training and at the process of teaching as a career and profession losing its social esteem and prestige to a considerable degree.

In addition to social and human rights expectations, we have identified a number of pressing tasks public education must deal with as soon as possible including *expanding institutional education to the earliest age possible, combating selection and segregation/separation in schools, eliminating early school drop-outs and guaranteeing the acknowledgement of the role teachers play in compensating disadvantages* including a due and fair remuneration. 'Public education (Balázs 2005, 2) can contribute to the development of human resources only if it can tackle the double task of strengthening economic competitiveness and social cohesion at the very same time and do so in a balanced way.'

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