

STUDIES

The Goals and Consequences of the Centralization of Public Education in Hungary¹

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Abstract:

Introduction: A robust process of centralization in education administration and school finance has taken place in Hungary in the course of the present decade. The governance, control, and funding of schools has been taken from local government by the state, and the autonomy of headmasters and teachers has diminished. However, neither the objectives of, nor the motives behind this centralization seem to be completely clear. This paper aims to contribute to the clarification of these objectives and motives, and explores whether the reform has been successful in achieving its declared objectives.

Methods: The clarification of the objectives and motives relies not only on an analysis of the existing literature, but on the textual analysis of various legal texts, together with the use of structured research interviews and press interviews with education policy makers and people working in education administration. Simple statistical methods (including inequality measures and concentration indicators) are employed to determine the impact of the centralization process via the analysis of administrative data on school finances, teacher earnings and student performance.

Results: It was found that while the declared objectives of the centralization included the reduction of inequalities in resource availability and teachers' wages, and an improvement in equality of educational opportunity, in the first two post-reform years there was a significant drop in the level of resources per student, resulting in a slight increase of inequality of resources. A drop in expenditure may in principle indicate a growth in efficiency, but in this instance this seems actually to have been achieved at the expense of shortages and other school-level problems with a negative effect on the quality of education.

Discussion: The usual requirements to be observed in public sector governance reforms were deliberately neglected, and the reform was carried through in the

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absence of any pilot study or systematic impact assessment. This is all the more problematic as the recent literature on the experience of other countries does not provide unanimous support for centralization. Further, given the declared objectives of the reforms, it is rather remarkable that no systematic monitoring of results was put into place.

Limitations: The analysis offered here is confined to the short term effects of the reform. A more complete evaluation of the reform will only be possible later, when the longer term effects of the process become clear. The relatively short time since the reform does not allow the definitive identification and evaluation of the effects of the centralization on student performance. However, the short-term effects on inequalities in school finances and teacher salaries are worth investigating at this point. The limited availability of school budget data from the pre-reform period restricts somewhat the reliability of the analysis of the effects of the reform on school expenditure. A further limitation is that the statistical analysis presented here is restricted to basic schools² only, in the interests of simplifying comparisons. However, a preliminary analysis of secondary schools showed very similar patterns.

Conclusions: The empirical results are to a certain degree inconclusive. As far as school funding is concerned, the inequality of funding increased right after the centralization, then stagnated and started to diminish significantly only after 2015. At the same time, from the perspective of school funding per student on the basis of the income of various local authorities, the results seem somewhat more satisfactory, and it is possible to identify some positive effects in this respect.

Key words: education administration, school finance, equality of educational opportunity, inequality of resources, teacher earnings.

² See footnote 10 for explanation of the term.

Possibilities of Psychological Intervention on Social Networks

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Abstract:

Introduction: Nowadays we are looking for help and answers to our questions more and more often on the Internet. People use social networks to search for communities or groups whose members experience similar difficulties. These are often online groups that focus on psychological problems, domestic violence, etc. Members receive instant feedback and at the same time, due to the online disinhibition effect, they do not feel the fear, shame or worries they would feel in personal contact (Griffiths, 2005). The content of such self-help groups is not always helpful, but may rather induce pathological behaviour. However, the group administrator can influence the atmosphere in the group and its content itself (Niwa & Mandrusiak, 2012).

Purpose: The purpose of this research was to find a space to perform professional psychological interventions inside online self-help groups on social networks. The concept of a field worker was used in this research. The field worker offers helping services to clients in an environment natural to them and where the worker can provide the client with emergency help during the crisis and prevent other clients from offering risk advices (Ambrózová, Vitálošová, & Labáth, 2006).

Methods: We have conducted qualitative research using the method of content-frequency analysis. The sample for this study consisted of 10 closed online self-help groups focusing on topics such as depression, anxiety disorder, domestic violence, self-injurious and suicidal thoughts and tendencies, etc. For the purpose of this research we created an online group moderated by professionals, focusing on similar topics of mental disorders.

Conclusions: The research results indicated that group members exchanged useful informations (35.43%), described their current difficulties they were experiencing (32.33%), shared their own experiences (10.53%), and also published information on what had helped them manage the difficult feelings and situations they had been experiencing (6.39%). However, we also identified risky statements and threatening recommendations in posts and comments. Based on the results, we outlined the possibilities of online field worker interventions and described techniques of interventions that the professional can use for the benefit of group members.

Key words: online fieldwork, social networks, online communities, adolescent, psychological intervention.

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Cognitive Competences of English Language Teachers and Their Impact on Use of Teaching Methods with Learners at Lower Secondary School

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Abstract:

Introduction: The paper discusses the term cognitive competence of foreign language teachers and focuses on their application in practice. It also deals with possible impact of cognitive competences on choice of teaching methods. The paper identifies a list of the cognitive competences which are both expected and needed when conducting English lessons.

Methods: For the purposes of the survey, the qualitative method of direct observation was chosen. To maximise valid information about the taught lesson, identical observation and self-evaluation sheets had to be designed first. The findings are analysed, compared, and conclusions drawn for school practice.

Results: The survey data show which cognitive competences the teachers of English language use the most and the least when the teaching of pre-intermediate learners from two grades was observed at lower secondary school. The main findings also highlight the necessity of using a wider variety of more up-to date teaching methods and approaches suitable for both target grades of learners, in contrast to still prevailing traditional ones.

Discussion: It needs to be admitted that the authors of this paper are not aware of works which deal with similar research of cognitive competences. Though many authors write about social, key and teaching competences in general, cognitive competences are still a kind of Pandora's box. It is recommended both that deeper research be undertaken in this field and that teachers pay more attention not only to relevant theoretical knowledge within, for example, courses of continual professional development, but also to the impact on their learners' performance of the cognitive competences being used.

Limitations: The authors are aware of the limited number of observed lessons due to objective reasons such as the reluctance of some teachers to participate in the survey. The survey sample of four observed lessons is too small to enable definitive, generalisable statements to be made about the use of cognitive competences and the appropriateness of teaching methods. Additional, observed lessons would yield more valuable and valid results.

Conclusion: The survey proves that cognitive competences are a necessary part of teachers' personalities and abilities and their usage can depend on the proficiency level of learners of English language. The authors assert that the topic of cognitive competences and their impact in foreign language teaching has still not been

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explored in detail. It is an interesting area involving active metacognitive and cognitive functions influenced by many factors which tend to change according to the teacher's historical context. This idiographic survey for the purposes of a graduation thesis carried out in a small town school can be regarded as a modest contribution to the topic.

Key words: competence, cognition, metacognition, method, teaching process.

Giftedness as a Possible Risk of Bullying

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Abstract:

Introduction: The paper deals with a possible level of risk in cerebrally gifted pupils in relation to bullying at lower secondary schools and grammar schools. In terms of personality characteristics, gifted pupils form a very diverse group, but some research suggests that they might be a risky group concerning school bullying. In the Czech Republic, the most of cerebrally gifted pupils attend ordinary primary schools or grammar schools and they are in daily contact with other pupils. Due to ambiguous research results, there is a question if it is really possible to think of certain risks in the case of cerebrally gifted pupils in relation to their school environment. Quantitative research tried to answer these questions.

Methods: The research was focused on the perception of selected areas in the class social environment by the diagnosed cerebrally gifted pupils, the undiagnosed gifted ones and the ordinary pupil population. A quantitative research strategy for bullying incidence mapping in primary and grammar schools were determined. As a research tool, a questionnaire was chosen. Gathered data from the initial questionnaire were evaluated by the following methods: dispersion analysis (ANOVA) for data spread by Gauss curve, Kruskal-Wallis test for data with non-Gauss distribution, arithmetic mean, Pearson Chi-Square Test, correlation analysis and contingency tables.

Results: There are differences among the class climate in ordinary classes and the classes with diagnosed cerebrally gifted pupils and undiagnosed pupils. The comparison was at the level of schools, it means among primary schools and grammar schools. It was found out that the cerebrally gifted respondents repeatedly met some form of bullying.

Discussion: On the basis of the findings, the authors assumed that cerebrally gifted pupils (GP) represent a risky group in social interaction with their peers and are more prone to different symptoms of bullying. This has not been statistically confirmed. The overall score was similar in other groups.

Limitation: The views of teachers and the views of some psychologists suggest that within the GP group, there is a special group of GP that is not identifiable by traditional questionnaires. For further research, it is worthwhile to consider opting for such research methods that could reveal those pupils.

Conclusions: Based on these results, it is possible to support those authors who consider GP as a specific group with their own problems, different values and perceptions, but similar to their peers.

Key words: gifted pupils, bullying, social climate, risk.

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ARTICLES

Inclusion, Diversity, Equality in Non-Formal Education through the Optic of Youth and Youth Workers

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Abstract:

Introduction: The aim of the study was to find out what is the understanding of relatively new terms coming into the cultures of Middle-European countries – inclusion, diversity, and equality (hereinafter referred to as IDE) – from the point of view of young people (n=30) and youth workers (n=16) in Slovakia.

Methods: For data gathering, we used a method of focus groups (4 meetings). Data analysis was based on three criteria: consistency in understanding the terms, an overview of types of obstacles that keep young people from self-realisation and an explicit or implicit expression of understanding the basic principles of inclusion in education. The content of IDE terms was mostly from the area of the social field. The term diversity was closely explained in the psychological-personal fields.

Results: The most frequent obstacles for applying IDE approaches were seen in the social, health and religious spheres. From the pedagogical and methodological point of view, the problem is also in the difficulty of preparing the projects based on the principles of IDE while the youth workers proclaim autonomy in solutions and do not trust the possibilities of using general methods because of specific need resulting from the specific context of their work. Also, they proclaim natural applying of the IDE principles and the existence of specific needs in the informal education does not represent any problem for the inclusion of the group members in the activities of the organisation.

Limitations: Work with youth is very varied. Performs in different areas of life and also involves working with different groups of young people. The selected research sample consists of youth and youth workers who are only a partial sample of the sample. It is assumed that in a larger group of respondents (both youth

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workers and youths themselves), respondents' views may differ somewhat in some of the areas studied.

Conclusions: This research provides information on understanding, implementation and obstacles to applying the principles of inclusion, equality and diversity in practice. We believe that the information we receive is very valuable as it opens the imaginative door to the specific kitchens of individual youth organizations where these principles are directly implemented. They show their nature of application in practice, they suggest some risks, as well as a certain bias towards the application of the terms emerging (probably?) from theory. As can be seen from the results of our research, the emergence of specific needs in non-formal education in practice does not pose a problem in the inclusion of group members in leisure activities.

Key words: inclusion, diversity, equality, non-formal education, youth, youth workers.

Development of Intercultural Competence during Pedagogical Practice of Ukrainian Students in Vocational Schools in Slovakia

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Abstract:

Introduction: In the presented paper, the role of practical training in the formation of intercultural competencies is considered in terms of Dublin descriptors on the basis of educational intercultural practice.

Methods: For the purposes of the study, a multi-stage model of intercultural practice was developed. The method of comparative analysis showed the correspondence of the model to the main descriptors. The study is based on the results of intercultural practice of Ukrainian students in vocational schools in Slovakia.

Results: It has been shown that the four levels of practice in the form of short-term introductory intercultural practice, ethno-cultural educational practice, scientific and pedagogical communication practice abroad, as well as long-term intercultural training correspond to the Dublin competence descriptors in the form of knowledge, skills, communication, autonomy and responsibility.

Discussion: The results of the research show the directions in the formation of intercultural competencies of students. Close cultures such as the Ukrainian and the Slovak can be a launching pad for building deeper competencies. The pedagogical practice of Slovak and Ukrainian students develops the intercultural competencies of both the trainees and the students.

Limitations: The study was conducted in a limited number of educational institutions in Ukraine and Slovakia. It is expected to increase their number on the principles of reciprocity in order to develop intercultural competencies in the students of the two countries.

Conclusions: The model is practically implemented in the process of the teaching practice of Ukrainian students in selected schools in Slovakia. An increase in the level of intercultural competencies was observed both in the Ukrainian students and in the students of Slovak schools.

Key words: intercultural competence, pedagogical practice, Dublin descriptors.

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