



HUNGARIAN COUNTRY BACKGROUND FOR
UNDERSTANDING BETTER THE
IDENTIFIED GOOD PRACTICES ON
REGIONAL, LOCAL AND SCHOOL LEVEL



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Hungarian country background for understanding better the identified good practices on regional, local and school level

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Policy context

During the quarter of a century that has passed since the political transition following the fall of the communist regime in Hungary, there have been several reform processes in public education, which, in the first 20 years, followed international trends in their basic principles, but were characterised both by stability and unpredictability. Stability meant structural stability (e.g. freedom of school choice, local governance, institutional autonomy) and stability regarding the basic principles adopted by the profession (e.g. lifelong learning approach, learning- and learner-centred curricular paradigm shift, outcome-oriented approach, efforts towards equity, quality improvement). A multi-level content regulation (National Core Curriculum, framework curricula and local pedagogical programmes) and a mandatory institutional quality management system have been introduced, the pupils' competence measurement has been fully implemented at the age of 12, 14 and 16 (linked to particular years); furthermore, the Government has also urged and supported equal opportunity planning in several ways. However, development concepts supporting implementation processes have proved to be volatile, there are hardly any examples of fully implemented reforms that are still less monitored, therefore, at the institutions' level the lack of stability could rather be observed in their everyday operation; in addition, the communicated basic principles have not been internalised, no lasting change of mindset have taken place widely at practical level.

The rapid changes in the economic and social processes of this period (primarily the demographic decline, the significant transformation of labour market needs and the spread of information and communication technologies) have created exceptional challenges for the actors of the public education system. During the efforts made by the schools in order to address their new role, the socially disadvantaged groups have become the biggest losers, the disadvantage compensation capacity of the Hungarian education system has significantly deteriorated. The Hungarian education system that has become extremely selective by now, in which the results are largely determined by socio-cultural status, presents a problem not only in terms of the catching-up opportunities of

disadvantaged groups, but according to analysts, this reduces the performance of the system as a whole.

The above challenges have been addressed by several education and development policy programmes of the last decades, which have attempted to support the quality of school work both through central and local-level developments in addition to investments in infrastructure. Hardly any systematic assessments of the programmes have taken place, therefore we know little of the extent of their use at institutional level, this is also a possible reason for the frequent scepticism of experts in this field. Besides allowing institutional autonomy, another characteristic feature of the Hungarian system is the lack of accountability, which also causes the eventuality of information about efficiency and about the integration of development funds. Based on the OECD's investigations, this could have a lot of implications for the systemic performance as well, as in the comparison made on the basis of the results of the PISA surveys, the worst-performing systems are precisely those which are characterised by a high-level autonomy and a low degree of accountability (systems with a low-level of autonomy and relying on severe accountability perform a little better). Overall, it appears that the capacity of the institutions to use development funds was largely up to the school leaders, just like the way those funds helped the development of the schools as organisations and of the teaching staff.

Since 2010, very rapidly introduced system-wide reform measures have been implemented on the basis of Government directives completely different from the previous ones. In principle, centralisation is typical, the schools which were maintained by local governments have become State-maintained, one single central institution, maintained by the Ministry, has become the employer of approximately 150 thousand teachers, thereby the employer's rights of school principals have ceased. Autonomy has been prejudiced in many other areas, the core curriculum has been revised by a restricted group of experts, by comparing knowledge with upskilling, the regulatory frameworks on the previously achieved textual evaluation and on reducing the failing practice have been abolished. The previously market-based textbook market has essentially been dismantled and a new textbook series has become mandatory which has not given scope for quality work, given that it has been developed extremely rapidly. Centralisation efforts lacked background infrastructure and appropriately qualified human resources, the financing needs were not assessed sufficiently, therefore even in the 5th year after its introduction there were structural difficulties in the daily operation of the schools.

Besides the centralisation processes the Government was committed to introduce a teacher's career path, accompanied by wage developments implemented in several phases. In connection with this, the teacher's career path was divided into 5 stages: *teaching assistant, novice educator, educator, master teacher and researching teacher*. The promotion in the career model was designed on the basis of the mandatory uploadable teacher's portfolio, on the one hand, and on the basis of the evaluation grades of the school inspection system that was abolished in 1985 and has been newly introduced for the first time since then, on the other hand. Portfolio assessment has not been an integral part of Hungarian practice, and within the established administrative framework many of its essential features have been lost, thus teachers have felt mainly the administrative burden; furthermore, the school inspection system has met considerable resistance. It is no wonder, since in Hungary even the teachers of the same schools and of the same fields never visit each others' classes, thus any kind of control creates distrust. The administrative difficulties related to the introduction of both the career model and the school inspection system, the inappropriately attached wage model, as well as the lack of appropriate communication have not made those reforms popular neither within the society, nor within the profession. All these factors strongly determine the general mood of Hungarian teachers, which resulted in the series of protesting movements in 2016, supported by wider social groups than ever.

Cooperation among teachers

It follows from the above that peer learning among teachers is not really embedded in the regulatory and system environment, the processes of the last decades have tended to produce individual outstanding performances, both in terms of teachers' innovations and in terms of management innovations. This seems to be confirmed by a recent research about innovations in the field of education in Hungary, which has identified that there are solitary innovators, isolated even within the teaching staff.

As regards the cooperation attitude of educators, the image can be modulated according to the different school levels: among nursery educators and lower primary level teachers (from the 1st to the 4th class) it works quite well, but in the system of specialised teachers starting from the upper level of primary school (from the 5th to the 8th class) it is already problematic, and the transition between the lower and the upper level is not free from conflicts, either. This can be explained by the fact that the teachers identify themselves primarily as specialised teachers, which tends to be even stronger in grammar school education, whereas in vocational education and training the almost total separation of profession-related subjects from general education subjects, as well as the eventuality of field practice aggravate the situation. The situation seems to be even more unfavourable as regards the insufficient cooperation among the related sectors, the providers of services to pupils of mandatory school age; all this can be traced back to phenomena known from comparative international sociological surveys, i.e. that Hungarian society is essentially competing, cooperation is generally regarded as a weakness, which is reflected in schools as well.

Therefore, we could not identify any good practice that could be treated as a case study at national level; instead, we have looked at the incentive and inhibiting factors in regulatory documents, and have conducted semi-structured interviews reflecting upon the results of large-scale development programmes of the past decades, focusing on teachers' collaborative learning. Larger scale institutional development programmes have been launched in Hungary approximately from 2000 onwards, initially with the World Bank's support, then with budgetary resources and finally with the use of the European Structural Funds. Since 2004, project financing has become almost 100%, which does not contribute neither to the conscious implementation of long-term development strategies, nor to sustainability.

Collaborative learning elements in development programmes

From educators' research it is indirectly evident that educators in Hungary focus primarily on themselves, they like to do their work independently, consider their profession as a vocation and think that one needs to be born for that. This common attitude and professional self-image present a serious obstacle for the profession and for the professionalisation efforts that are discernable in the governmental rhetoric as well. Cooperation is moderately present in Hungarian educational researchers' field of vision, far more resources are devoted to the analysis of the short-term impacts of the current structural changes.

Looking at the largest development programmes of the last two decades, the following conclusions can be made as regards cooperation:

- Any of them did not specifically aim at cooperation, but meaningful development cannot take place without cooperation, thus indirectly this element was also present.
- Since the use of cooperative techniques is not decisive in the schools' practice, the development of relevant reference books and the implementation of training programmes have been included in several development programmes.
- In schools implementing alternative education programmes considerable success could be achieved in this field.
- Most development programmes aimed at school development, they were essentially characterised by liberal approaches and innovation efforts, which absolutely constituted a

step forward compared to the State socialist approach. At the same time, the questionable use of democratic principles (with large autonomy, but without the development of an appropriate professional support system) did not allow for the actors to acquire the necessary knowledge and capacity, thus professional standards and protocols could not be developed.

- At the turn of the Millennium, a significant number of schools took part in the (TQM) model programme supporting the introduction of modern education technologies, one of its key elements was the establishment of quality improvement teams within schools, but due to the change of government no time was left to phase out the programme and there was no impact assessment, either. According to *ex-post* peer reviews, these programme types, relying largely on institutional autonomy, were introduced too early after the change of regime, to which the actors of education were unprepared.
- The elements of most development programmes relied on staff cooperation, it was typical that teams composed of teachers made strategic and development proposals for the identified problems, which resulted in a strong attitudinal change, mainly at the individual level, in case of 3 or 4 persons as driving forces. They were the ones who found subsequently an attachment to their own development opportunities in any other programme and created isolated innovations throughout the country.
- As regards the impact on equal opportunities, mainly the programmes conducted in schools in small settlements are worth mentioning, those schools were most in need of external support, since they had no chance to participate in development programmes before. In this case, the Government's intention was also present, the involvement and the financing of small schools took place mainly deliberately, the democratisation impact of this process emerged precisely in the establishment of territorial workshops. Furthermore, each large-scale disadvantage compensation programme funded through the Structural Funds included an element aimed at supporting cooperation among teachers, for instance, the use of mentoring systems was typical.
- However, there has not been any country-wide development programme during 25 years, thus the development of adaptability has not been due to continuous and collaborative professional development, but to constant instability.

Incentive and inhibiting factors of collaborative learning in regulatory documents

The description of the system environment can be approached primarily by the analysis of regulatory documents:

- *Output requirements of teacher training and expected competences from teachers:* Teacher training formulates the objectives in a competence system including training and output requirements, one of the objectives concerns professional cooperation. The system was introduced approximately 10 years ago, since then the rules have partially been changed, but have been transposed into the daily practice of teacher training only gradually. The teachers' competences include the following:
 - development of the pupils' personality,
 - assistance to the establishment of groups/communities of pupils and development thereof,
 - planning of the educational process,
 - knowledge of specialised methodology and subjects,
 - organisation and management of learning processes,
 - assessment of educational processes and of pupils,
 - communication, professional cooperation and career identity,

- autonomy and responsibility for professional development.
- *Documents related to the organisation of schools, National Core Curriculum, framework curricula:* Besides centrally determining basic literacy content, they do not contain other restrictions, the institutions are free to choose their training methods, tools and curricula.
- *Guidance documents/regulations for supporting and evaluating educators:* The period spent as a teaching assistant is characterised by a mentoring system, the subsequent stages of the career are covered by the newly introduced educator evaluation system, with manuals describing the method of evaluation, the portfolio preparation, as well as the way of self-assessment. All these are principally related to educators' competences, thus they look at cooperation as well, but the methods for professional cooperation among teachers are not developed, instead, the focus on communication is enhanced. In school inspection manuals, this is reflected in similar, but in an even simpler form.
- *Regulations for the support of continuous professional development:* In the Hungarian system the support for a career implying continuous professional development is present only as a recommendation. According to current regulations in force, educators have to participate in accredited further training programmes of 120 hours every 7 years, which may also be replaced by certain other activities. Thus, for instance, 25% of those programmes are "not organised, are aimed at enhancing one's professional preparedness (hereinafter referred to as: self-tuition), which may take place by observing others' experience (visiting others' classes) or by trying out and demonstrating working forms, processes, techniques, methods in one's own practice (demonstration class)."

The 2008 TALIS research findings regarding collaborative learning in Hungary

- The TALIS survey showed a relationship between positive school climate, the professional conviction of teachers, their cooperation, their satisfaction with educational work, professional development and various teaching techniques. In each of these factors, individual differences are greater than the differences across schools or countries.
- "Cooperation among teachers and school discipline are not significantly interrelated, but in some participating countries (for instance, in Hungary, but also in Austria, in Belgium, in Iceland, in Korea, in Poland, in Portugal and in Spain) it can be shown that teachers who are engaged in more innovative forms of cooperation with their colleagues (e.g. team teaching) feel that their work is more efficient than those who work on their own."
- "In Hungary, the forms of cooperation among teachers belong to the 'exchange and coordination' type, which includes the exchange of teaching material, the related debates at staff discussions, group discussions, the participation at conferences and the establishment of common standards. Hungarian teachers tend to show less vocational cooperation, i.e. teaching in teamwork, visiting each others' classes, feedback to each other about their experience, coordination of homework assignments in different classes and years and engagement towards common vocational learning activities."
- "With leaders assuming a professional leading role, cooperation among teachers is better, teamwork is more frequent." *"Teachers are the key actors of education. Synthesis report on the first results of the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). 2009. Institute for Educational Research and Development, Budapest)*

Summary

In the light of the above system factors, we could not identify any good practice specifically at national level regarding teachers' collaborative learning. The identified regional, local and school cooperation forms are important examples illustrating deliberately organised cooperation among teachers in Hungary, but they are worth reading with due regard to the country context. The

identified examples tend to be characterised by an aspiration to intensive cooperation and peer learning, rather than by their adjustment to the description according to the basic principles identified in the EFFeCT project, which reflects an Anglo-Saxon logic, with a different cultural background. In the description of good practices we have tried to cover their understandability in the domestic context as well.

Identified good practices

- School level:
 - [Workshop for teachers focusing on school improvement and community building in the Pécs-Somogy Primary School](#)
 - Portrait
- Local level:
 - [The Network of Teacher Learning Communities of Pollack Mihály Primary School in Kazincbarcika](#)
 - Portrait
- Regional level:
 - [The DeMo project for the networking of organisations working with disadvantaged children](#)
 - Portrait