

SUMMARY

PROGRAMS FOR SUPPORTING DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

This issue's main goal is to examine the operation of programs promoting the successful education of disadvantaged students. Most of the articles published in this number explore the effectiveness of Hungarian schemes and policies for improving the learning conditions of underprivileged elementary and secondary school students. The programs analyzed here were launched mostly at the national level in the past 8–10 years. Apart from studies that deal with Hungarian problems and achievements, the issue also includes articles introducing foreign examples. These latter essays are meant to provide an overview and evaluation of the complex educational programs for supporting disadvantaged students that are ran in some highly industrialized countries of the West.

Gábor Kézdi and Éva Surányi [*The Impact of a School Integration Program for Disadvantaged Children on the Students' Development*] present results from the evaluation of a program of the National Network of Integrated Education (Országos Oktatási Integrációs Hálózat – OOIH) of Hungary. Since 2003, the program has promoted integrated education of Romani and disadvantaged students in Hungarian primary schools (grades 1 through 8), and it has provided comprehensive educational and financial support for the 45 participant schools. The authors assessed the effect of the program on the development of the students by means of comparison to a matching control group of schools. The dimensions analyzed were literacy, secondary school enrollment, and non-cognitive skills such as locus of control (one's belief in controlling one's own destiny), self-esteem, and coping with difficult situations. The authors explored overall program effects as well as specific outcomes for Roma and non-Roma, disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups of students. The results showed small but significant positive effects in virtually all dimensions and for all groups of students. Due to the non-experimental nature of the analysis, the causality of the program effects cannot be claimed as certain. However, econometric evidence supports the causal interpretation, and it is clear that program schools achieved a greater success with children of similar background than non-program schools. Our findings demonstrate that it is possible to provide integrated education in Hungarian primary schools in a way that benefits minority and majority students alike. Modern educational methodology as well as better incentives for schoolteachers can explain the success.

Vera Messing and Emília Molnár [*A Comparative Study of Scholarship Schemes for Disadvantaged Ethnic and Social Groups of Students*].investigated the target

population and the operation of two scholarship programs. The “Roma” scholarship aims at supporting Roma students while the “Útravaló” scholarship scheme is targeted at socially disadvantaged students. The research work involved both a survey of students and parents, and qualitative background research of the schools and the social environment. The findings showed that the composition of the student population of both scholarship schemes is fairly similar while the type of services provided by the two programs is rather different. The study highlights those mechanisms that result in the fact that Roma children generally have less access to high quality services than their non-Roma peers.

Ilona Liskó [*The Impact of In-Service Trainings on Teachers' Attitudes*] analyzed the data from a research project conducted between 2006–2007 which examined the effects of teacher trainings in the Integration Scheme. The Integration Scheme is intended to promote the integrated education of socially disadvantaged and Roma children and the improvement of the institutions that educate them. Throughout the research work the background of the trainees, the evaluation and the outcome of the trainings were examined. The study focuses on the impact of the trainings on the attitudes of the teachers trained. The data showed that the effectiveness of the trainings was strongly influenced by the attitudes of the trainees. The trainings had a positive effect on the attitudes of the teachers trained but the effect was rather small. The majority of the teachers did not believe that students' skills could be improved neither before nor after the training, and they had serious doubts about whether a successful integration between schools would be possible at all.

In 2000 the Ministry of Education started a project aiming at the reduction of social inequalities. Anikó Fehérvári [*Target Students of the János Arany Talent Care Project for Disadvantaged Students*] studied whether the program was successful in compensating for social disadvantages. The analysis – based on a 2005 impact assessment – explores the socioeconomic background of the students who entered the program, and describes the specific handicaps they struggle with. The second part of the study the author – based on the data from a 2007 research – compares the participant students' family background and materials taught in their classes with those of non-participant secondary school students (high school, secondary vocational school and vocational training school students). The study demonstrates that disadvantaged students would have had worse schooling opportunities without the support of the program.

Arbitrary control of authorities coupled with the complicatedness of EU bureaucracy has caused a great deal of difficulties for the applicants during the first two terms of a HEFOP tender originally intended to help eliminate cultural barriers of Roma children. Lányi András and his students [*Opportunities and Inequalities in the Financing of EU Tenders*] investigated the effects of an inhuman and unreliable application process. The aim was to extend civil initiative to educate the disadvantaged outside the school system and disseminate “best practices” in the course of the project, but participants soon had to start spending the majority of

their time complying with the ever changing demands of a just too complicated financing procedure. Small organizations with the best professional background got ruined by the nonsensical financial conditions. They could hardly earn a penny in the first half year of the project while they were forced to send detailed reports about the use of the money they never received. If tasks were still fulfilled it was only due to the merit of the teachers employed by the civil organizations. They worked for free in a lot of cases as exploitation was not new to them. The question rises: why should we insist on concentrating resources for improvement outside the education system in this framework if the rules do not work well for voluntary organizations – but they rather cause their bankruptcy?

EU financed projects often are seen as miraculous tools of public policy reforms, such as in the case of policies that promote equal educational opportunities. However, in reality running projects can turn into rather painful processes and become frustrating obstacles for the partners involved. Balázs Krémer [*The Project-Disease – or, the “Tanoda Syndrome”*] argues that the technical difficulties detected at a surface level are rooted deeply in the widely shared attitudes and philosophies of the projects. Two main ideas are highlighted among the conceptual problems. One of them is the role of public managers who require certain tasks from the successful applicants to do – but, in fact, they do not assume responsibility by imposing more substantial requirements. They rather tend to introduce over-detailed and over-bureaucratic procedural rules which are clearly pointless. Instead of that, they should implement regulatory and financial tools that could help make the new developments sustainable. Eventually, sustainability becomes the task of the supported providers – for whom it is a mission impossible without the necessary assistance from the relevant government agencies.

In his article [*The Missing Agent Local Governments and Equality of Educational Opportunities*] János Zolnay assesses the factors behind the failures of government's anti-segregation and pro-integration educational policies in the last six years. The performance of children at schools and chances for entering higher education is determined by early school choice to a much greater extent in Hungary than in most OECD countries. Decentralization of the centralized educational system already began before political transition and the process was accomplished by 1993. The new system was based on a more liberal curriculum and output-regulation, normative funding and diversified school structure. Local municipal councils became responsible for maintaining public schools. Funding for maintenance from state budget is normative and non ear-marked. The government's integration policies intended to stop and reverse segregation tendencies between schools, branches and classes, but despite the considerable efforts these goals could not have been achieved. The fundamental dilemma is whether opportunities in the sphere of public education can be made more equal while leaving the current system untouched. The problem is that there is no agent at the decision making nor at the executive level which would be willing and/or capable of implementing govern-

mental measures targeted at providing for more equal opportunities. Undoubtedly the policies applied by the local governments enhance inequalities. It is also true however, that parental choices also count and thus unequal distribution of educational services is both a result of the choice of influential parents and the existence of attractive schools.

Eszter Neumann [*20 Years of Reform in England. Equal opportunities in Competing Schools*] gives a review of the educational reforms that took place in the last two decades in England with a special focus on equity issues. The first part of the article gives a brief overview of the neo-liberal educational policies and explains the recent shift to centralization carried out with the use of knowledge-based regulation tools. Policies addressing disadvantaged students are embedded into larger programs that are meant to improve the quality of education in general. Next, the paper discusses the various interpretations and frameworks of equal educational opportunities that have been in use in the past 20 years through the analysis of specific educational programs which encourage the dissemination of innovative ideas and best practices in schools located in economically depressed areas. All in all, the question rises whether the policy goals of equity and educational excellence are conflicting or could be achieved parallel

The study of Julia Vida [*Policies and Programs for Supporting Disadvantaged Students in the United States of America*] is a brief overview of the main issues and policies related to the equality of educational opportunities in the USA. It starts with a short description of target groups and a characterization of the problem(s) from the American point of view. Then it goes into more details about three important problems of equality of educational opportunities by citing results of relevant recent research and taking a glance at some of the solutions applied. In the second half of the article the federal role is discussed. The historically greatest federal involvement into education was the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which set up clear objectives concerning disadvantaged students. The law is analyzed here both by giving a short account of its antecedents and by presenting some of the most common arguments for and against it.