

## TEACHERS OF REFORMED SCHOOLS IN HUNGARY

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*Our questionnaire research on teachers of reformed grammar schools in Hungary started in spring 2007. In this research we try to compare the data of a database having 169 representative samples with the data of countrywide researches covering non-religious schools as well. We focus on the characteristics of teachers: how the characteristic of teachers of religious schools differ from or resemble the characteristic of teachers of the whole Hungarian teacher community. Most of the students of reformed grammar schools in Hungary are in low social status, come from rural areas and their parents are often unemployed. These schools are situated in the undeveloped part of Hungary, as the rate of Calvinists is high in these areas. However, the students of these schools are successful during their further education. According to quantitative researches the teachers are who help their students to succeed. It is therefore so important to know their characteristics and the norms and values they represent.*

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More than 15% of Hungary's population belongs to the reformed denomination. The church runs 26 secondary schools beside its other numerous obligations. The Doctoral Program of Educational Sciences in the University of Debrecen pays special attention to denominational educational institutions in Hungary and in Europe. There have already been a great number of studies in this field, and there are new findings at present as well. Among the Central European countries there are currently surveys about students studying in Hungary, Ukraine and Romania (Pusztai, 2006; 2007), as well as teachers in Ukrainian schools where the language of education is Hungarian (Molnár, 2007). The empirical research about the teachers and the organizational atmosphere of the reformed grammar schools was conducted by the Department of the University of Debrecen together with the Reformed Pedagogic Institution. The teachers got the questionnaires in envelopes and they were asked to give the closed envelopes back to the schools coordinators after answering the questions without giving names. We got 169 filled questionnaires back from 11 schools; four of these schools are in the official residence of different counties, while 4 institutions are in smaller towns. We did not get back any questionnaires from the schools in the capital. The inclination to answer the questionnaires was very much varied in the different schools in question. There were institutions that sent back only 4 closed

envelopes, while there was a school which sent as many as 20 envelopes. We would like to present the analysis made on the basis of these answers, which we also compared with findings of former empirical researches in certain cases.

### Fundamental characteristics of the sample

38% of the people filling in the questionnaires were male, compared to the national average of grammar schools which was as low as 28.7% in the school year of 2005/06. So we can say that the rate of genders is the best balanced in Hungarian reformed grammar schools. The rate of females increases in most European countries, which presents a problem there, too.

We divided the sample into three parts on the basis of age. The first group was under thirty, it meant altogether twenty people. The second group consisted of the middle-aged; this was the largest group with 93 people, who constitute the core of most of the staffs. The members of the third group were over 55, but only fourteen people complied with this category when this sample was taken. The average age in the schools was the same as the national average: 41 years.

As there was only one reformed school allowed to function before the change of regime, most of the teachers have not been working long in the school where they filled in the questionnaires. Less than one third of the teachers have been working for more than ten years in the institutions in question, and one third of them have not even spent four years there. The overwhelming majorities of the teachers work full time and has a status in the institution where they filled in the questionnaire. In some institutions all the questionnaires without exception were filled in by such teachers. It is an essential point, because a lot of educational tasks are carried out more efficiently by such stable teachers than by teachers who spend less time in the institution. There were only 19 people altogether employed part time or as teachers who give lessons but have not got a status. In one of the schools, however, almost all participants belonged to these two categories. Unfortunately, we do not know whether it is a relevant indicator for the whole school as well. The reason why only a few teachers had personal experience about how denominational schools work is the same: only 14 of them studied in such institutions. Nevertheless, some kind of adherence to denominational schools could be detected in half of the cases, as a relative either attended or still attend a denominational school. There is another group of 14 people who did not study in a denominational school, but one of their relatives from the same generation did. In these cases especially brothers and sisters, husbands or cousins could speak about their experience. In most instances, however, it is their children or other children of the family who could keep the continuity. In rarer cases the ancestry (parents, grandparents) serve as links. It occurred only in 8 cases that the family chose denominational schools through several generations.<sup>1</sup>

20% of the teachers answering the questionnaires teach science subject(s), 16% teach art subjects, 16% teach languages, 6% teach religion and the rest teach other subjects like P.E., or they work in the youth hostel.

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, among those who marked that some of their relatives studied in a denominational school (76 people) only 69 people gave a detailed answer, which may not be full (they did not enumerated everybody).

## The features of the schools

All the institutions except for one are refunded or newly founded. As a consequence the staffs are relatively homogeneous: there is a core, a so-called ancient generation, who has been working there since the foundation, and there are colleagues who joined later, when the school was already operating.

There is no standardized requirement regarding the entrance exams to the reformed schools. In most institutions (apart from two exceptions) there is some kind of assessment to check students' knowledge or competence or at least an oral exam or rather a conversation to get to know the students' personality.

We asked the teachers in the form of open question why they had chosen the given school as their workplace. 115 gave shorter or longer answers. We divided the answers into categories on the basis of their marked message. The prime motivation for choosing the given school was the Christian value system, the spirituality of the school and the consequent school atmosphere. A lot of teachers explained their choice by their attachment to the reformed church and considered this job as a mission. In case of 18 people it happened by chance that they got into these schools. At a smaller rate it was the management or the maintainer of the school that offered the jobs. There were teachers who considered the school's high educational standards the most important. For 14 teachers there was either a personal attachment or family concern to the given school or the reformed schools in general, as the ancestors or they themselves had studied in these institutions.

## Social mobility

The most valuable and the most interesting indicator of social mobility is the level of education from our point of view, which we examine between the generations following each other. As all the teachers had academic qualifications, we could measure the existence or the rate of social mobility by the parents' level of education.

Teachers in reformed secondary schools are mobile unambiguously upwards, too. There is not a difference between genders in this respect, so male teachers' parents have degrees to the same extent as women's parents. One third of the whole sample comes from intellectual families. Parents' level of education is homogeneous in a family, but mothers finished their education in secondary schools providing certificates of final examination on a larger scale.

## Career on the wane, professional mobility

There are no prospects for promotion for secondary school teachers in the traditional sense of the word (apart from non-pedagogical careers like headmasters).

We cannot speak about a great mobility within the profession in reformed schools either. Less than one third of the teachers answering the questionnaires have a post in the school. There are a lot of teachers who worked in other jobs before (43%), most of them spent only one or two years earning money in another way, however, there is a colleague who did not teach for 20 years and now works in a school.

More than half of the teachers have at least two degrees: they generally got the first one as regular students in universities, while the second one was acquired as correspondence students in universities or less frequently in colleges. It is more typical in the older generation that they first graduated from colleges then they reached the university level as well. Teachers take part in numerous other courses after graduation as well.

### Incomes, salaries, financial situation

We inquired about some durable consumer goods (freehold flat, car, access to the Internet, Home Cinema, etc.). The teachers who answered our questionnaires are equipped with them fairly well or on the average. As for a subjective welfare scale, more or less one third of the teachers placed themselves to the lower third part of it, and almost half of them to the middle. So very few people think that their financial situation is outstandingly good, compared to others. It means that the teachers in question live in an average financial situation or under the average compared to their environment.

As compared to the OECD countries` average, Hungarian teachers lagged behind to a great extent. The salary of teachers with 15-year-old experience in the ratio of GDP per man differs in Hungary and in the average of OECD countries to medial strength. In 1996 this ratio was 1.6% in OECD countries, while only 0.9% in Hungary, in 2000 it was 1,5% and 1%.

After this in 2002 the base rate was increased, as a result of which the financial appreciation of teachers became better. As a consequence, in 2004 the ratio reached 1.2% in Hungary, too. (By this time the OECD ratio had decreased to 1.4%.) (Education at a Glance, 1998; 2002; 2005)

### Marital status, choosing a pair

The situation is similar in reformed schools to the national sample. It is more typical here, too, that men live with teaching wives. It is more often in the case of women that their pair has not got pedagogical qualifications or even if he has, he does not work as a teacher. However, we cannot state that the pairs of teaching women are less qualified, as we noticed in the national sample.

73% of the teachers have already got a child, the average number of children is 2.1, which is about the same as the national average, but if we look at the ratio in marriages, it surpasses the national average. We can also notice that those who are married have a bigger family than the family they came from.

### Teachers' tasks

What and how much do teachers work? First and foremost the teacher performs duties in school, namely they teach, prepare for the lesson and assess the students` achievements. Besides, they have further tasks like supervising the student out of class, organizing educational excursions, keeping touch with parents and cooperating with colleagues.

According to the teachers who filled in the questionnaires, the most important task of a teacher in a reformed school is education, the second one is forming the character, and least but not last paying attention to spiritual

progression. After this they mentioned community forming, organizing free time activities and administration.

On taking the sample, it was an extremely topical question, as the Ministry of Education increased the teachers' educational and other school tasks at that time. The teachers in question thought unanimously that administration and extra-curricular activities had increased among school tasks. Teachers have to work 2 hours more on the average, which is in accordance with the law. Mostly it means study circles, societies. We also wanted to know how the teachers found time for these extra activities, and it turned out that mostly they have less time for preparing for lessons and even more often they sacrifice their time for relaxation.

Generally it takes the teachers an hour longer per week to prepare students for competitions, to help them catch up with others, to pay attention to talents and to listen to spiritual matters. There is a task to organize a programme and a weekend activity at least once a month. (This is an outstandingly high number compared to the national data.) The rate of the hours that the teachers undertake voluntarily on these occasions is a bit lower (there are teachers who take up an extremely great number of voluntary tasks). The number of periods shows a different picture in different schools. In some institutions this load is bigger, while in other schools they were able to meet the new requirements with less workload.

### Quitting the profession

Unemployment as a threatening possibility has appeared in this profession too, as the number of children starting schools has decreased. Nevertheless, this problem is not manifested in the grammar schools under survey to such an extent as in primary schools for instance. The reason for this is that since the change of regime all the pupils have tried to go on studying in secondary schools giving GCSEs. Thus the demographic nadir came to these schools only later.

Only very few of the teachers we asked are thinking about giving up their job, or changing schools. The rate in general is lower than in the national sample: the two data are 17 and 28 people. There are only two people who are absolutely sure to quit this profession. It is clear that dissatisfaction with the workplace motivates change and results in thinking about changing schools without question. However, these people want to quit not only the school, but their profession as well. Those who want to give up this career work part time or give lessons almost without exception, so they are not stable members of the staff, and their situation is rather without prospects.

Teachers who work full time teach with pleasure, and what is more, in the given school. Unfortunately, the worsening working conditions (increase in the compulsory number of periods) overload the teachers and those whose tasks have increased to a great extent (with three or more periods) are definitely thinking about changing (both the school and the career).

### Reformed schools in the light of other schools

As denominational schools were not allowed to operate apart from some exceptions, the teachers working for a longer time had already taught in other

non-denominational schools, as we mentioned before. These are mostly older, experienced colleagues, who started teaching a long time ago.

In our survey 65% of the people have such experience. We asked them to compare their present and their previous workplace or workplaces (mostly it means 1-3 schools) from some points of view. They had to evaluate certain aspects from 1 to 5 (from much worse to much better).

The teachers evaluated their present school more favourable than their previous one from all the viewpoints. What they considered outstandingly better was the atmosphere of the school and the staff, and the school's management as well. Besides, they assessed students' behavior better, too.

### Teacher's religiousness

The teachers under survey were mostly christened as infants. 94% of them got this sacrament by the age of adolescence. There were only six teachers altogether who are not baptized. 64% of the christened belong to the reformed church, 33% are Roman Catholic and three people are evangelic. There are schools where we can see that the teachers who filled in the questionnaires are overwhelmingly reformed, while in certain institutions we got answers mainly from catholic teachers. As regards religious practice we make difference between personal and communal one. It is essential by all means in a denominational school how often the teacher goes to a religious community, church service or how they live their faith personally. One teacher claimed to be definitely non-religious and two more people considered themselves non-religious. Nine teachers could not define whether they are religious or not. All the other teachers regarded themselves religious, most of them in accordance with the doctrines of the church (54%). They think they have a very strong or a strong tie to their church. The rest (38%) regarded themselves religious in their own way, which is perhaps a bit difficult to conceive. They have only a loose tie if any to their church. The rate of religious people among the teachers of reformed schools is far above the rate of religious people among the adult population in Hungary. As a matter of fact, this rate in all the Hungarian adult population is just reversed: 15 and 59%

Most of the teachers (66%) agreed with the statement that their immediate family and friends consider them religious. So their religiousness is evident to their environment, too. Their family and friends are considered more or less religious as well, which means a mostly homogeneous religious background. About one fifth of the teachers' family and friends under survey can be defined as firmly religious.

### Educational values

We asked the teachers to make an order of importance of five principles. They considered the principle "students should extend their knowledge in school" the most important, and spiritual growth was almost as important as that. The third place was taken by the principle "students should learn to behave", the fourth principle was "students should learn to work". The least important in the list was the principle that "students should feel good in the institution".

Among the educational values the most essential were reliability, honesty, responsibility, all of which are primarily altruist values. The least important ones

were enforcing interests, economy and skills required to make a good leader (cf. Pusztai, 2007, Bacskai, 2008). On the basis of preferred educational values and their order, we could divide the teachers into four groups. The first group (23 people) was made up of teachers who consider forming altruist values much more important than other values preferred at a workplace like leading abilities or economy. For them students' spiritual development is just as important as attitudes to work. The second group consists of teachers (25 people) for whom the most important values are in connection with work. They think that the primary goal of the school is to teach students to work. The third group comprises a great number of teachers (52 people), who prefer values appreciated by the middle class like independence, love of work and responsibility. It is also a numerous group (53 people) whose central values are the traditional, reformed, communal principles like patriotism, tolerance, good behavior and inner harmony at the same time. They not only live by these principles but they also try to impart them.

We could group the features appearing as typical educational goals with the help of factor analysis. We could separate five different groups as can be seen in Fig. 3. We classified the values expected from students into the following categories: 'Good adaptability', 'Developing personality individualistically', 'Traditional protestant values', 'Features exploitable in the labour market' and 'General Christian characteristics'.

## Epilogue

There has always been a great emphasis on education in public belief. It is a Hungarian characteristic that we think that schools play the greatest part in it. In 1994 an opinion poll wanted to find out what the factors are that contribute in childhood to the characteristics of an adult later. The findings showed that the adult population over the age of 18 considered schools and teachers the second most important factor, right after family. It is another matter that teachers ranked themselves only to the fourth place-after the influence of the family, friends and the media (Szabó, 1998).

We hope that the increasing practice that the reformed church with its remarkable traditions has in education again will make the teachers' educating work even more efficient and successful.

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