



Spatial Inequalities and Social Exclusion in Small Schools

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Abstract

In my research I conducted interviews with teachers and parents of a small school in an ethnically mixed settlement where the majority of the children are Roma. On the basis of the before mentioned while examining the context of a small settlement's school, it can be asked whether it is a separating school context which excludes children of different social strata or it is a concentrating one. Furthermore, was it really the goal of the settlement on the one hand to maintain an institution aimed at elite training where, their children get the proper knowledge to preserve their present lifestyles, and in order to achieve it to maintain a concentrating special school for children of lower strata, which prevents the downcast in many respects from moving up?

Introduction

“If it were up to me I would get teachers to make an oath, like doctors do who take an oath to save the lives of people at any rate, so I get those teachers who come to teach in a Roma school to swear that they will teach Roma children with their clearest conscience and greatest knowledge because Roma won’t be able to break with their ways of living as handcuffed slaves until their children reach the knowledge level which makes them be able to be ministers or doctors, as God has willed, in that way, until they will win rights like blacks in the US. And there have already been black attorneys, head surgeons, and police officers; sooner or later as Obama became the Prime Minister.”

As one of my interviewee mentioned, teachers could make a significant contribution to solve ethnical problems. According to Bourdieu (1978) social reproduction and its social aspects take place at school. The school pursues the social reproduction presenting social inequalities as educational inequalities traced back to individual abilities, but after individuals have left school the school converts those into economic capitals again. The school makes the capital, which was socialised by the family, marketable but it pretends to reward intrinsic values of the individual. Therefore middle classes reproduce themselves in that way as if they would have had it to the individual credit instead of family socialization. The most hidden function of the school system is that it hides its relationship to social class structure and it reproduces social inequalities while pretending to be independent.

Ladányi and Szélényi (2005) in their study have raised the question whether it makes sense to deal with development education when non-Roma with the same certificates have more chances to escape from poverty than Roma? Kertesi and Kézdi (2005) have stated that poor, Roma or culturally different children are segregated into a separate class or a school by an administrative decision but it is also possible that it is the result of the free school choice system. In their opinions, it is exactly the disadvantaged children, who especially need better education, receive weaker one. In that case it is not the family background which disadvantages children but the mechanisms of social exclusion which have a harmful effect on poorer, culturally different families.

Babusik’s (2002) study shows that Roma parents are in favour of integration and they would like to enrol their children in schools where the majority are non-Roma. In spite of that fact the survey reveals that Roma children have been concentrating more and more in certain schools since 1993 when parents could choose the school of their children freely. Therefore more and more Roma children have attended schools where there have already been Roma. At the same time, in schools where fewer Roma children have studied, their proportion has declined. It is also characteristic that Roma children go to school with fewer than 200 children in small settlements.

Fiáth (2002) in her study has estimated that 73% of Roma children attend schools with alternative curricula. It could be meant small partial skills disorders, but as regards the Roma ethnic minority it has already been accompanied by severe segregation of which

consequences are limited curricula and segregated education, which can cause negative effects on self-esteem too. With the firm intention to separate the majority society also plays a crucial role in increasing school separation. It is essentially the same mechanisms which create striking inequalities in distribution among schools as the one which cause segregation in settlements. In certain schools the proportion of Roma children has started to increase due to the migration effects. Majority families react to that by trying to enrol their children to other schools (Havas & Kemény & Liskó, 2001) In that way schools in settlements may become schools with only Roma students meanwhile there have already been a great number of non-Roma children in their settlements. It occurs that the migration of majority children into another school decreased significantly the number of schoolchildren remained; in that case it became difficult to maintain the expenses of the school. Consequently, every fifth Roma child is assessed as lightly mentally disabled by assessing committees. As the number of children is decreasing, schools are interested in preserving as many children as possible; moreover special education training provides them with a larger grant. The fewer children go to school the more additional grants the school needs (Havas & Kemény & Liskó, 2001).

The overrepresentation of Roma children in special classes cannot be traced back to biological or psychological reasons; their high proportion compared to the one of majority children exists only because of socio-cultural drawbacks. Their stigmatization, which accompanies them, can also be regarded. That kind of education results in long-term unemployment, deep poverty, and relying on social services. That process can be inherited from generation to generation (Gerő & Csanádi & Ladányi, 2005)

The existence of special education mostly is in direct proportion to the number of Roma children, which can also be regarded as covert segregation. The existence of ethnic or catch up programs sometimes also reflects to local government's policy preference, which can influence the school strategy plan too. It can be declared that Roma children are more likely to participate in catch up and ethnic education in small schools where the number of Roma children are over 25% regardless of their developments and disabilities. As Babusik reports, 14.4-19.2% of Roma students can attend secondary schools offering final exams. Those data are also expressive because they reveal how complex effects the institution, its teachers and surroundings have on children (Babusik, 2002).

On the basis of Kertesi and Kézdi's (2005) report 97.7% of the non-Roma population continued their studies after completing year eight's class in 1995, and only 51.2% of the Roma population. Among the reasons in the latter case can be bad financial circumstances and other types of decisions within the family, for example the parent himself or herself was unsuccessful in secondary school. With regard to the completion of primary school studies, 52% of the Roma population and 77% of the non-Roma population finish their started secondary school education, so since the '80-ies the low

schooling of Roma has remained unchanged; the one of non-Roma inhabitants improved to the '90-ies.

Fehervari (2013) in her study estimated the drop-out rate of students in vocational schools: It is approximately 25%, especially in low-prestige educational programmes, where the highest rate of Roma students can be found. These numbers can also show the results of a school career in elementary schools: While one quarter of Roma children face failure in elementary schools and 16% of Roma students repeat a grade, amongst non-Roma students this rate is only 9%. As Kertesi and Kézdi (2012) report, the differences of test result between Roma and non-Roma children are mainly caused by ethnicity and bad living conditions which the school cannot compensate. Romas' secondary and university schooling even worsened. According to the representative Roma survey of 2003 their disadvantages in schooling increased even more. To the '90-ies Roma youngsters moved towards the vocational training schools after primary school but those trades were devalued in the labour market (Kertesi & Kézdi, 2005).

A Small School in an ethnically mixed settlement

The settlement has about 60% of Roma inhabitants, and their number is increasing as Hungarians move to surrounding settlements continuously and the price of the properties go lower. During my survey I conducted interviews with the head teacher, teachers and with parents. The examined school have 121 students. According to my interview made in the first year, 95% of students were of Roma descent. It increased to 99% in the second year. Every year two or three students drop out of school, which depends on parental motivation, according to the head teacher. The number of children were continually growing in the years past partly because of newly settled families. The teaching staff remained stable in the years past. The local school provides children with free meals, though in some cases it was withdrawn because the family had large arrears.

In 2004 the school introduced a new pedagogy program for pupils with special education needs. They take part in differentiated lessons in small groups or in catch up programs held by a special teacher. It is characteristics of teachers in this school that except for the Math teacher they are not inhabitants of the settlement. Every morning they commute here from neighbouring villages, but most characteristically from the nearest town.

Since the free school choice law which granted a right for every parent to choose their children's school, non-Roma children have been gradually disappeared from the local school and have been enrolled in the school of the neighbouring settlement. An irreversible process began, in which the education standard started worsening and the requirements lowering. By now out of 30 non-Roma children nearly all commute to the nearest settlement.

According to the head teacher on that given year only one student in year eight is not applying to anywhere because of parental decision, three children is applying to

secondary schools and others are enrolling on secondary vocational training schools. On the basis of previous years' experience roughly half of those children will not complete their secondary school studies. During their secondary education Roma children should counterbalance not only family disadvantages but disadvantages collected in primary schools as well (Havas & Kemény & Liskó, 2001)

Babusik's (2002) survey reveals that there are fewer and fewer resources allocated to schools where the majority of students are Roma children and schools which launch special education classes than elsewhere. Therefore their teachers also receive worse salaries, as they work more overtime, have more tasks to be completed and more energy to put into. On the basis of surveys made in schools where the Roma were in majority, there were not any teachers who had regarded the school as being guilty of children's school achievement. None of them thought that either negligence or a lack of basic knowledge was a defect. It was easier for them to refuse to accept the task and always blame parental carelessness for what teachers could not cope with for many years. Bad school memories, school failure experience of parents do not improve children's positions. It appears that education has no real benefit; therefore there are connections between the status and the school careers of the Roma (Forray & Hegedűs, 1998).

"There are so many disadvantaged children that our school undertook the schooling of those children. From the viewpoint of education it's hard to swallow a lot, so if a child doesn't have a tendency to collaborate, you can't do anything. For this reason it is impossible to improve skills of children above year six, especially in year eight because they simply don't have any tendencies to do that." (I.M.)

"There are generally two or three parents at the parent meeting. They aren't interested in their children so much." (D.G.)

"The problem is that it is a tilting at windmills because in vain you want to teach children materials or teach parents how to study with their children at home, if They are no partners. That is the situation and we have to accept it. I do everything in order to improve children's skills. Certainly, they don't study because they don't have that custom at home and they are lazy." (A.D.)

On the basis of Babusik's (2002) report it can be shown that only 30% of the Roma parents take part in parental meetings. If parents were involved into school dialogues, personal relationships would be developed between parents and teachers; and children's absences from school might be decreased too. However, most teachers judge this mission to be above their limits. Although, personal relationships would be important for students too, and on the basis of reports those made school work more successful. Consequently, it can be said that it is those teachers who can build personal relationships with their students and managed to involve parents too, in other words, who manage to create positive atmosphere are more successful than other teachers who teach Roma. Extracurricular free time activities, which can improve school achievements too, could be important and it is learning how to study which can guard against school

failure. Parental praise also plays an essential role in positive reinforcement, if parents recognize the school (Forray & Hegedűs, 1998).

I am citing from an interview which I conducted with a teacher. In the excerpt of the interview she mentioned the girl who was the only non-Roma who goes to the school.

“What can we do? We live together...next to each other. Order cannot be kept, so I allow them to go out from class ...I tried so many methods to interestingly teach them...But Á., She is good educated, clever, she is the hope, she is going to secondary grammar school. Others are bad-behaved, don't finish school, a girl in grade six is already an adult woman!”

She spoke about managing relationships with parents awkwardly; nevertheless she would have had more opportunities to enter into relations with parents because she was a local inhabitant. After those lines, we can raise some questions. How much do teachers appreciate the conflict between Roma and non-Roma inhabitants? How much do they avoid conflicts when they throw the responsibility on families? Is it because of a communication problem or a superordinate connection and how much role does either of them play?

Reading between the lines it is possible that the two groups know little about each other and the institutes of the majority require that the group of the minority should assimilate. Student books and workbooks use a language which sometimes is difficult to understand. There are different behaviour requirements or prohibitions at home and at school. Even in well-equipped houses there is a shortage of books, and many children have never seen anybody who regularly goes to work. On the other hand, the school can hardly digest that it is a product of another culture; it can hardly recognise otherness, that's why it treats it as ethnic features. (Forray & Hegedűs, 1998). Ethnicising social categories can hint that persons of civil society try to define a social problem as it would be characteristic of only a race or an ethnic group (Ladányi, 2005). It can be also interesting that the teachers made a distinction between the local Roma not on the basis of their traditions and culture but on the basis of how much their life were in order and when they had moved there.

It can be stated that differentiated lessons are not enough while the teachers are not willing to get to know the values of the Roma and establish connections with the members of the other group. On the other hand until the non-Roma inhabitants regard integrating Roma into the majority of society as their largest task it is not in accord with lower level education which is given to the Roma children than the majority of society has (Forray & Hegedűs, 1998)

“If people knew how much support the Roma got...they are being stuffed with money and in vain...they don't want to integrate into society. But of course there are examples that the opposite is also true.”(T.G.)

“Among them there are normal ordinary people who want and also would like to move up. But the majority of them are not interested in anything, have no motivation and goals. They have

got absolutely nothing. They follow the example their parents set at home. Parents get up, take their children to school at 8, go home, gather, watch soapoperas on TV and they don't do anything all day. They collect grants, social security benefits, about which I don't know exactly anything, but it doesn't interest me. All the same, so they get grants.”(R.G.)

“The reason for their having so many children is that they get grants after their children, and that process has become a habitual system. Practically they would have a kid factory at home; the new generation is constantly being born.”(B.F.)

Having no adequate knowledge about the institutes of the majority of society can be a source of parental anxiety, if it was decreased, unacceptable reactions and behaviours would be decreased too. Most parents can regard school achievements as fruitless and meaningless. On the one hand marks cannot be meaningful from the viewpoint of children's further life courses, on the other hand because of the effects of discrimination on labour market (Forray & Hegedűs, 1998).

Parents, in the examined school often complained about the quality of the school. In their opinions each schools in neighbouring villages has better education. For this reason children make no use of being excellent students at this very school when in secondary schools they will be low achievers. That process makes children's career impossible, as the requirement level is as low as teachers overtly say that children are not permitted to fail in their studies. Teachers could do that because in that way they will not need to deal with problems of over age children and because it may be less likely that children will drop out. Therefore everybody can get a certificate, but there is a question of its worth.

Below can be read an excerpt from an interview I made with a special education teacher. It can be read between the lines that most of the teachers are burnt out, and see no points for these children to break out.

“If I have graduated from Bárczi, I don't think that I will remain here, so I will move on and won't spend my whole life here. It isn't good to work in places where there is no positive feedback.” (A.K.)

Mobility between villages

The schools, where Roma children do not go to or hardly go to, often accomplish quite a lot in order they meet the social requirements which expect that Roma children stay away from their schools and in that way they keep their schools' good reputation. If the settlement has only one school, that means that the children enrolled have to take on extra time, money and energy to commute to another settlement. That is the way which creates better level education for children in upper social strata families with special pedagogical services. On the other side stands an institution which from the beginning sets reduced requirements for their children referring to facts that they are lacking suitable skills or abilities and cannot get rid of failures of family socialization.

There were 103 children at school in the neighbour settlement during my interview. It majors on IT and foreign languages. It has its own swimming pool. They hold study method lessons for those who require, and a drama study circle in afternoons. One third of the children are commuting from the examined settlement, which is a high number, especially when it is taken into attention that the neighbour school receives the grants per capita of children from the studied settlement. Among from eleven teachers seven live in the settlement.

According to the head teacher in 1977 their school became a regional school when their school was merged with the school in another village. Then since 1993, with the beginning of the free school choice they have maintained eight classes again. The number of children are low. There are usually ten to fifteen children in year one so their school was often threatened by closing down because it was regarded as a small school. From year to year there were fewer and fewer children starting the school year. In spite of that danger the head teacher did not admit Roma children to be enrolled mostly because of the majority parents' pressure.

When I asked him why they did not admit Roma children, he said,

"It isn't a problem that they have brown skins, but they are badly-behaved. They come here in the day time, and steal. The police officer doesn't do his work well, he is also frightened. They reproduce themselves quickly for having grants...I myself couldn't put my child next to a deviated child. We need to support the outcast, but what can be lost why do we have to pay? Is it right that they get tender grants titled as for positive discrimination? The teachers don't have any authorities there; parents also don't respect them..."(B.G.)

Is it the responsibilities of parents?

"There were times when parents went to teachers angrily and said, 'Why doesn't have my child a scholarship?' Then teachers said that OK, everybody had to have a scholarship instead of explaining it in a Roma meeting that it wasn't possible that everybody be an eminent student and a scholarship holder here. If they had invited some Roma intellectuals in order that parents could see and understand it. Why didn't they hold open days when parents, especially those who quarrelled, misbehaved and threatened teachers would be present, but no, everybody rather washed their hands. Do you need a scholarship? Here you are! The state will give it to you!"(H.I.)

There is only one teacher from the school who usually visits homes; Accordingly, no other teacher makes home visits, which otherwise could be essential as it is an important step teachers can take in order to know more or simply make relationships with parents if they don't go to parent meetings at all.

This teacher goes around the families where children have not gone to school for a long time and have had uncertified absence. During most home visits parents tried to find different excuses in their children's defence and referred to different illnesses. In those cases she mentioned for example dance classes if the child takes part in dancing which

she herself arranges and teaches as an afternoon activity. There were cases when for dance sake, as the child is able to be successful there; parents encourage their child to participate.

Parent-teacher conflict can be resolved with difficulty until each party is not able to realize the other's emotions, behavioural reasons and thoughts. Though a minority group can adopt prejudices, negative stereotypes of the majority, which can lead to negative self-esteem, self-estimation (Tajfel, 1974). If that situation is created and there are no relationships with the majority of society, children can suffer from total lack of perspectives. Only the majority society can provide them with help based on acknowledging and recognizing individual successes. In that case it is possible that an often mentioned danger, which is also known as educating how to live by getting financial aids, occurs. It is hard to move up if there isn't a driving force of development or an example to be followed. For that reason it needs to strengthen children's positive attitudes towards school and self-images, and to promote their positive experiences at school. If children go home with positive experiences, their parents can judge school positively, and a successful interaction with school can be created (Forsay & Hegedűs, 1998).

Many parents said that it was not their children's levels of cognitive development which were problematic. According to them the problem is that almost all the teachers employed at school are teachers who could not find a place elsewhere or were not put on payroll. That can also play a role in the school's educational level decrease. The majority of parents oppose segregation and think it would be better if their children could go to school together with non-Roma children so the school's educational level could increase too. In parents' opinion there will not be changes in that situation while local magistrates take their children to the neighbour settlement since they could go to kindergarten. As it became apparent from a story, the family of the notary took their child to kindergarten in the examined settlement, who started to behave aggressively at home, as the notary said, so he was enrolled on kindergarten to the neighbour settlement as the majority of non-Roma families do in the village. Therefore since their childhood these children have not had any chances to meet each other, make relationships. In the long run it will probably have a negative effect on the relationships between Roma and non-Roma so the situations will be aggravated, social contacts will disappear and stereotypes will survive.

These series of misunderstandings which happened at the Christmas ceremony in the local culture house, I think, exemplify the communication abyss between parents and teachers, which could be caused by each other's misunderstandings and misjudgements. The regular Christmas ceremony took place in the local culture house. It is one of the places which are used by both the Roma and non-Roma population, but not together and not at the same time. For that occasion children of each class planned to show something which was taught chiefly by two teachers. There was a full audience of parents and teachers. Parents complained that non-Roma inhabitants were never curious about

performances. While the performance was going on, a teacher mentioned that the majority of parents would not endure sitting there till the end; it would be too long for them. In fact, there arrived some parents to take their children home after they were ready, but it happened at breaks between performances, so it was not disturbing. Nativity play, which was said to be the high spot of the evening, just started when the implication system went wrong. Low rumbling murmurs could be heard from the last rows where parents were sitting. As the play was going on it became more and more difficult to follow the events because children's voices could not be heard. At that time there was more and more shouting from the last rows, which frightened children who already had stage fright. These teases from the last rows made rumbling murmurs louder, and it became more and more difficult to pay attention to the performance. The head teacher tried to pour oil over troubled water by the way that she stood up with arms raised up and calling for silence moderately. But it was in vain. At that time the teacher, who taught children the play, became upset, ran onto the stage, scolded parents down because they were not curious about their own children, and broke the performance before it could have been ended. After that parents with their children dispersed in a flash. That also characterizes the situation where some conscientious and sensible teachers are not able to reduce tension, which causes unsolvable problems.

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