

Inclusive School Leadership

1. INTRODUCTION

Integration in kindergartens and schools in Hungary started in the late 1970s, almost simultaneously with the integration initiatives and movements in Western Europe. Initially, social integration appeared as the ultimate goal of special education, and then it was defined in the 1980s as “the idea of educating children of different abilities and development in an integrated, common system” (Lányiné, 1987, 933). In the early period, the focus was on the possibilities of integration of children belonging to specific disability groups and the “inclusion” of these children, and then shifted to the conditions of public education necessary for integration. Hungarian legislation provided for integrated education as an alternative to special institutions in the 1993 Public Education Act. (Act LXXIX on Public Education) At the same time, it regulated the conditions for co-parenting by means of regulations (Csányi & Perlusz, 2001). The term ‘inclusion’ was first used in a socio-political sense to refer to measures that intervene directly from above to reduce exclusion, declaring that society values inclusion more than discrimination.

Inclusion means all the continuous and targeted interventions that make the eco-social environment inclusive by preventing the exclusion of specific persons and making them successful (Varga, 2015). In 2005, at the UNESCO conference in Salamanca, Spain, ninety-two governments and twenty-five international organisations addressed the Education for All programme, resulting in the Salamanca Declaration (Csányi & Zsoldos, 1994). This means that all children have the right to an education within the mainstream school, taking into account their individual characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs. Since the 1990s, the concept of inclusion has also appeared in public education in Hungary.

In the early 2000s, Booth and Ainscow developed the conditions and steps necessary to make educational institutions inclusive (Booth & Ainscow 2002, 2011) and introduced the concept of the “Inclusion Index”, which is based on a situation analysis of the institution’s functioning and provides support for the inclusive institution development process. The Index for Inclusion looks at the development of an inclusive approach for the institution, the development of a programme for its implementation and the organisation of everyday practice. (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

2. THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP – A PROJECT PRESENTATION

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education is an organisation that brings together the Member States of the European Union to promote

cooperation on inclusive education and to increase the quality and effectiveness of work in inclusive institutions.

The organisation, currently made up of 31 countries, was founded in 1996 on the initiative of the Danish government, and Hungary joined in 2006. Participating Member States delegate two people per country - one decision-maker and one professional representative. Through its thematic projects, the Agency addresses issues such as the financing of inclusive education systems, the organisation of support for inclusive education and, more recently, the support for inclusive management, which is the focus of this study.

The Inclusive School Leadership project, launched in 2019 (Supporting Inclusive School Leadership, hereinafter SISL), is a precursor to the 2014–2017 project (Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education) which identified school leadership as a critical factor in creating a more inclusive education system.

In their summary report, they highlighted that the support of heads of institutions is essential to make inclusiveness work.

Besides Hungary, the SISL project involved Ireland, Sweden and Malta. The aim of the project was to examine how to improve inclusive school leadership through local and national policy frameworks and support mechanisms. During the SISL project, we examined the policies and institutional practices of the participating Member States in order to describe by the end of the project:

1. the policy environment for inclusive school leadership, i.e. the educational policy framework needed to develop and support inclusive school leadership in the education system,
2. the competences that can characterise a successful and effective inclusive head of institution, and
3. opportunities, tools and good practices for training, professional development, i.e. what supportive professional development opportunities are needed to train effective, inclusive school leaders?

The focus of the first phase of the research was the review of international and European policy documents and guidelines, and the systematization and interpretation of the data found in the literature. Data was collected from 21 countries on legislation and policies affecting school leadership, including inclusive school leadership, the roles and responsibilities of school leaders, their requirements (qualifications, degrees, experience and competences), and opportunities for professional development and ongoing professional support. The research shows that:

- At the international level, there is a limited amount of literature on inclusive governance and a lack of concrete recommendations. At the national level, these appear mostly in the context of special education institutions.
- Inclusive leadership roles are not sufficiently clear.
- There is a lack of training materials and programmes supporting professional development and the skills needed for leadership. The training of managers focuses mostly on management and administrative tasks instead of inclusive pedagogical strategies.
- There are also gaps in how inclusive school leadership is supported in participating countries.

- There is little specific policy regulation on inclusive governance (European Agency for special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018).
- Three main elements were identified in relation to school leadership, linked to successful inclusion practices: transformational leadership, distributed leadership and instructional leadership. They focus on developing a shared vision, shared ownership and shared decision-making. When these three characteristics of leadership are combined in practice, they have a significant positive impact on student achievement, pedagogical quality and the development of the school's professional community. (European Agency for special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018).

During phases 2–3 of the project, a model for inclusive school leadership was defined (*Figure 1*), using the results of “A model and a vision for inclusive education systems” (European Agency for Education and Training, 2015):



FIGURE 1. MODEL OF INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP
(adapted from European Agency, 2018b, 15)

According to the inclusive school leadership model, the vision of the inclusive school leader (or leadership team) is that all learners – not just those with special educational needs or disabilities – should be provided with high quality educational opportunities in the local community, alongside their friends and peers (European Agency, 2015, 2019).

The model builds on the human rights approach to education, in particular the key principles of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). Inclusive school leaders take responsibility for each and every student, valuing each one regardless of their abilities, needs and background. It creates an environment in which all learners can have the best possible learning experience and experience a sense of well-being and belonging to a community. The inclusive

school leader builds partnerships with the parent community and the school's external environment. Inclusive school leadership goes beyond the organisation to address inequalities through community building and full participation. It focuses on developing an inclusive culture in which all stakeholders are supported to work together, value equality and ensure that all learners receive a high quality education, including those most at risk of exclusion.

Transformational leadership is a popular theory of management science associated with Bass (1985), and is characterised by the leader's charismatic personality and ability to motivate others. Transformational leadership is important for setting the vision and inspiration for inclusion. It focuses on creating structures and cultures that improve the quality of teaching and learning, set the direction and ensure the development of people and (re)define the organisation (Day et al., 2016) This leadership role is often associated with the ability to create change and innovation that impacts on school culture (Stankevice et al., 2013).

According to the concept of distributed leadership, leadership – as the control, influence and initiation of change – is not only for the principal or the management of the school (deputy principals, workgroup leaders), but all actors have an impact on the culture, performance and values of the organisation, so everyone is directly or indirectly involved in leadership. Distributed leadership is therefore the awareness and knowledgeable application of this, the effective allocation of tasks, with the aim of supporting the development of both the people in the organisation.

Finally, the so-called instructional leadership towards inclusive education impacts on human resource development and organisational development. It highlights the importance of setting clear educational objectives, planning the curriculum and evaluating teachers and teaching. The primary focus is on the responsibility of leaders to improve the quality of teaching-learning (Day et al., 2016), which is why it is also called learning-centred leadership.

The results of the first phase of the SISL project have highlighted the need to give institutional leaders the knowledge to make decisions to put inclusive education into practice, but also the need for support and accountability for inclusion. Three factors have been described that support the creation of inclusive schools and the effectiveness of inclusive school leaders. These include access for example to suitable pay and status, to the necessary resources, training and professional learning opportunities in inclusive governance, the opportunity to engage with a wide range of stakeholders including communicating with policy makers to extend their powers. The second factor is autonomy (e.g. in making evidence-based decisions about the strategic directions of the school, in the flexible application of the curriculum, in adapting the assessment and accreditation framework to meet expectations and the needs of the local community and learners in appointing teachers and other staff, in providing expertise to support school development, in allocating funding and resources equitably). Finally, the third important factor is accountability in the areas of vision, values, definition of results, monitoring and self-evaluation (European Agency for special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2019).

In the third phase of the project, a self-assessment tool was developed and tested, which can be used by school management to help move towards inclusive leadership. Using the Self-reflection tool, school leaders are asked to reflect on their own practice using the questions.

The reflection covers the following areas:

- Identify the results of current practice and the main strengths and challenges.
- Prioritise issues to be addressed in order to implement inclusive practices.
- Identify policy support needed to support existing or inclusive practice.

The self-reflection tool is divided into three sections: reflection for school leaders, reflection for policy-makers and joint reflection. When using the self-reflection tool, school leaders can choose to do only step 1 or they can move on to levels 2 and/or 3.

The questions are structured around three key roles of inclusive school leadership:

1. Setting direction
2. Organisational development
3. Human development.

The tool contains seven columns. Column 1 contains questions for inclusive school leaders, which respondents rate on the scale below:

- to consider (column 2): this is a practice that has not yet been considered but should be.
- emerging (column 3): the practice is under consideration and implementation planning is underway
- in progress (column 4): the practice is partly implemented and steps are being taken to implement it more widely.
- implemented (column 5): the innovative use of good practice by the school is based on this and the implementation expectations have been met.
- sustainable practice (column 6): this practice is sustainable as an integral part of the whole school organisation and culture.

Each of the three sets of questions is followed by some summary questions to allow respondents to highlight areas of strength and areas for improvement, and to prioritise the activities needed for inclusive school leadership. In step 3, participants can identify policy support needed to support existing or inclusive practice that is missing in national/regional policy. This information can be used in dialogue with policy makers to develop policy to support inclusive school leadership.

3. THE SITUATION IN HUNGARY REGARDING THE SISL PROJECT

In Hungary, Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education (Hungarian Parliament 2011) defines the terms of appointment of school leaders as well as the school leaders' main duties and responsibilities. More detailed information on duties and responsibilities of school leaders can be found in Ministry of Human Capacities decree 20/2012 (VIII. 31.) on the Operation of Educational Institutions and on the Use of Names of Public Educational Institutions. (Minister of Human Capacities, 2012).

The Government Decree No 326/2013 (VIII. 30.) on the Promotion of Teachers and the Execution of Act XXXIII. of 1992 on the Legal Status of Public Servants in Schools and all Public Education Institutions' (Hungarian Government, 2013) informs about the procedure of the appointments of school leaders in general.

Regarding quality issues, each education institution is obliged to conduct a self-evaluation every five years according to the national pedagogical-professional inspection system (Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education and Ministry

of Human Capacities Decree 20/2012 (VIII. 31.) on the Operation of Educational Institutions and on the Use of Names of Public Educational Institutions). There are three types of institutional self-evaluation:

- a) the teacher's self-assessment
- b) the institution's management self-assessment
- c) the institution's self-assessment

Additionally, teaching staff and the parents' community of the respective educational institutions evaluate the work of the school leader in the second and fourth year of their mandate, which has a total duration of five years. The head of the public education institution is a professional and administrative leader. There are no direct references to inclusive leadership in Hungarian official documents, but the school leader may be granted an incentive supplement by the employer, taking into account for example the following: the development of the number of pupils at risk of dropping out of school, his/her role and effectiveness in the education of pupils with special educational needs or in the support of the inclusive education of pupils with special educational needs with other pupils.

In the handbooks for self-assessment and supervision of school leaders, the areas of leadership evaluation are following the Central5 (Central5: Central European Competence Framework for School Leaders) criteria, which were developed by the European Commission-supported International Co-operation for School Leadership project (2008-2013). Among these competencies in the field of learning-teaching, the idea of inclusion appears as a key competence: "School leaders strive to create an inclusive learning environment in their work" (Révai & Kirkham, 2013, 94).

As part of managerial supervision, experts analyze e.g. the management application, the pedagogical program, the annual work plans, and the reports at the end of the school year. This includes issues related to inclusivity, e.g.: How does the education of students requiring special attention appear in the management program? How do the principles, goals and tasks of the pedagogical program support the implementation of individual treatment? However, there is no question specifically related to inclusive leadership.

The proposed set of questions from the leadership interview during the on-site inspection of school supervisors also includes one question related to the topic of inclusion in the context of the leaders' responsibilities: What do you do to create an inclusive education and learning environment? (Educational Authority, 2019, 94)

There are several government decrees and local documents which inform about school leaders' possibilities and responsibilities regarding the "steering" of their school (setting directions, developing staff and learners). In terms of setting direction, these decrees refer to the national core curriculum, framework curriculum as well as the local curriculum, the local pedagogical program, and local "organisational and operational rules" (hereinafter: OOR) (Decree No 20/2012 (VIII. 31.) EMMI on Operation of Educational Institutions and on Use of Names of Public Educational Institutions).

3.1. Training for school leaders

The Government Decree No 326/2013 (VIII. 30.) on the Promotion of Teachers and the Execution of Act XXXIII. of 1992 on the Legal Status of Public Servants in Schools and all Public Education Institutions defines the conditions of an assignment to become head of an educational institution. To become a school leader, candidates must undergo a specialist examination for school leaders (Hungarian Parliament, Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education 2011) This “qualification for head of institutions within the framework of teachers’ specialist examination” is a (2 years) special teachers’ further training, which includes basic legal, financial and management studies.

Besides this, looking at the continuum for professional development, all teachers as well as the school leaders are entitled to take at least 120 hours in the teacher further training system every seven years (Government Decree No 277/1997. (XII. 22.) on Teachers Further Training). The areas of competence that are required of school leaders are explained in the job descriptions.

3.2. Access, autonomy, and accountability of school leaders

In Hungary school leaders can contribute to development in education policy beyond their school through trade labour organizations or professional organisations as well as through the National Teachers’ Chamber. Possibilities within their schools, however, depend on local rules. The school board can give school leaders possibilities to set strategic direction and secure the commitment of all stakeholders. Furthermore, principals have the possibility to appoint teachers (Government Decree No 134/2016. (VI. 4.) on the National Maintenance Organizations and on the Klebelsberg Center).

On the other hand, the possibilities for adapting curriculum content are very low (10-20% of the National Core Curriculum). The same is true for managing school budget and allocating resources. However, school leaders are accountable for school outcomes (Hungarian Government Decree No 110/2012. (VI. 4.) on the Issue, Introduction, and Implementation of the National Core Curriculum, 2012) and professional examinations for school leaders also include topics on accountability.

4. AGGREGATED EXPERIENCE OF THE PILOT PHASE OF THE SELF-REFLECTION TOOL DEVELOPED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SISL PROJECT

The pilot study included online interviews with 10 heads of institutions. These included heads of primary, secondary and special education institutions. In addition, a focus group discussion was held with policy makers (8 participants). In this study, we report on the first experiences of using a self-assessment tool in the form of an interview with the heads of institutions.

We had all participants involved sign an Informed Consent. Prior to the interviews, the self-reflection tool was sent by mail, after which the questionnaires were taken in the form of an online interview. This format was well suited to the nature of the pilot study, as questions about uncertainties could be asked and clarified, and the face-to-face discussion also increased motivation. Interviews were conducted between May and July 2021. The average duration of the interviews was 60–90 minutes. The interviews were recorded and anonymized “minutes” were prepared from the audio files, which were used for the summary document. The audio recordings were then deleted.

All participants also completed the SISL pilot survey summary document translated into Hungarian.

4.1. General comments from heads of institutions on the self-reflection tool as a whole

(The number of mentions is indicated in parentheses.)

Participants in the piloting process were delighted with the topic processed by the tool and would consider it important to use the tool in practice (10 respondents).

The system and structure of the tool are considered good (2 mentions) and the wording of the tool is considered understandable (2 mentions). However, several respondents felt that the language of the tool is too technical, which makes the questions difficult to understand (7 respondents). The reason for this, in our opinion, can be corrected by simplifying translation, but there is no doubt that the novelty of the topic can play a role for the heads of institutions.

Several respondents mentioned that the number of questions was too high, which could reduce the motivation of the respondent (5 respondents), the wording was too complex and the questions themselves were too long (5 mentions). Several people mentioned redundancy, meaning a certain repetition of the questions.

On the scale of response options, they did not always find it easy to locate their own institution (2 mentions), and the mention of the category “Completed” was not considered to be a good one, as it implies closure and completion (6), but they all believe that there is always further development potential.

4.2. Reservations and challenges regarding the usability of the tool

What respondents identified as the biggest challenge was having to address issues related to institutional autonomy and they expressed doubts and difficulties in terms of cooperation with policy makers (3 respondents). The specificity of the situation in Hungary in terms of funding was reflected in the questions on this issue: respondents feel that self-financing is very limited.

All respondents consider that the tool can be used in their work environment, with its greatest strengths being that it can be used to create a long-term work plan

(2 respondents), to set the guiding principles for the institution (1 respondent) and to formulate new goals (1 respondent).

We quote two summary opinions from the interviewees in the pilot study: “An excellent opportunity to reflect as an institution leader on the approach, practice and process of inclusive school leadership based on a thorough analysis.”

“It consciously helps the head of the institution to think in specifics and not in generalities, otherwise it’s all for nothing.”

In our study we presented the first findings of a research and development project on inclusive institutional governance initiated by the European Agency, hoping that the idea and practice of inclusive institutional management itself will become an integral part of the professional discourse in Hungary in the near future.

5. CONCLUSION

The project titled Supporting Inclusive School Leadership (SISL), which is still new in Hungary, encourages Hungarian experts of the topic to think long-term. It is a challenge to place the topic in the professional discourse, in cooperation with policy actors, and to encourage the use of the self-reflection tool developed in the framework of the project to prepare school leaders and leaderships for the development of effective schools for all.

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