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Attributes of Successful Educational Change in the Background of Reform Efforts

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Annotation. The aim of the study is to investigate what ideas those involved in the implementation of educational change (teachers, school management, and pedagogical leaders) in Slovakia have about successful curriculum reform, what attributes they assign to it, and what characteristics dominate their ideas. Using the quantitative-qualitative Q-methodology design, five different opinion clusters have been identified, each of which can be interpreted against the background of the post-2008 Slovak experience of failed attempts at educational reform.

Keywords: *curriculum*, *curriculum reform*, *educational change*, *educational reform*, *Q methodology*.

Introduction

The improvement of education systems is a global phenomenon (Sahlberg, 2006). In recent decades, we have witnessed dynamic changes in such systems across all continents. According to Burner (2018), there are three major reasons for educational change: increased globalization, advancements in technology, and developments in research into teaching and learning approaches. Countries have responded to such impulses in various ways. The effects of reform efforts also derive from traditional cultural values (see, e.g., Sahlberg, 2011;

Curdt-Christiansen & Silver, 2012), and the nature of the changes (planned or implemented) depends on various factors: social, political, and economic.

At the end of the 1980s, the countries of the former Soviet bloc began processes of overall political and social change moving from communism towards a broadly based democratic system. After 1989[1], the V4 group countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) and the Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia) were exposed to multiple pressures which highlighted the need for fundamental changes to their educational systems and curricula. In the first place, there was a specific need to build a democratic education system. However, at the same time, other countries, too, had to respond to the above-mentioned global impulses; and last but not least, also to requirements of a modernizing economy and an open labour market (Janík et al., 2020).

However, the success rate of reforms and changes implemented in those countries varied, and it was not always consistent, in many ways it depended on their current ideological orientation and political power (more in Janík et al., 2020). For instance, in the 1990s Hungary underwent fundamental reforms, named the "Europeanisation of Domestic Education Policy" by Halász (2007), which created conditions for system reforms and new quality. The second decade of the 21st century has been marked by controversial political decisions in Hungary which in many ways have hampered the positive development trends triggered in the previous period (Chrappán & Beneze, 2020). Poland went through a similar experience (Janowski, 2007; Kuszak et al., 2020), while, in the Czech Republic, the development process was quite consistent, although not without problems, but without having experienced such dramatic processes as in Hungary and Poland (Greger & Walterová, 2007; Janík et al., 2020).

Theoretical Background

The Journey of a Democratic Slovakia to Educational Change

Slovakia belongs to the group of countries where educational change since the 1990s has not been fully managed successfully. While processes of transformation or transition from the totalitarian education system to the democratic one has gone quite successfully, system changes in the field of education have not been able to start for almost 30 years. Thus, it has not been possible in Slovakia to keep pace with education system reform movements taking place on a global scale and which were successful in countries such as Finland (Sahlberg, 2006), the province of Ontario in Canada (Levin et al., 2008), and Singapore (Bakar et al., 2006), let alone with the successful transformation of education systems in some countries in the so-called post-Soviet bloc (Fäht & Paškov, 2013; Kestere, 2019; Juozaitis, 2006).

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[1] 1989 to 1990 is a period referred to as one of democratic change in Central and Eastern Europe. 1989 saw the end of communism for several countries, including the former Czechoslovakia (of which Slovakia was a part).

Beginning in the middle of the 20th century, the education systems of the western world have undergone several waves of reform, as defined by Hargreaves (2009) and Hargreaves and Shirley (2009). According to these authors, the first wave, between the 1960s and 1970s, was characterized by a high degree of freedom and development of the teaching profession. The second wave of reforms, between the 1980s and 1990s, involved goals, performance targets, parental choice, and capacity building. The third wave, coming at the beginning of the new millennium, was characterized by the fact that, like the second one, it was based on top-down government performance targets, but it brought in further capacity building and lateral learning through peer pressure and support. The fourth wave combined top-down national vision, government steering, and support with professional involvement and public engagement, all for the purpose of promoting learning and results (Hargreaves, 2009; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

Since 1989, the Slovak education system has also undergone these waves at a declarative level in a sort of compact version (Kosová & Porubský, 2011). At the beginning of the 1990s, a strong wave of teacher initiatives arose, calling for professional freedom and autonomy. The initiative, however, did not find a response at the state level; therefore, it never entered even the initiation phase. It gradually became weaker. In the second half of the 1990s, the central-level induced changes characteristic of Hargreaves' second wave. The goals and performance targets were formulated a new. Parents gained more freedom in selecting a school for their children. The timing of the third wave partially overlapped with world trends, which was due to the institutional and economic involvement of Slovakia in global processes.

In 2008 Slovakia attempted to reform the systemic curriculum. However, the reform in fact resonated with Hargreaves' third wave only in that it was based on top-down government performance targets. Although the strategic documents presented by the state also declared intentions for capacity building and lateral learning through peer pressure and support, they were to be fulfilled somehow automatically in parallel with the introduction of a two-level curriculum model (national framework curriculum and school curricula developed on its basis). This process proved to be a misconception and that is why, despite its formal appearance, curriculum reform did not really reach the institutionalization phase and can be considered a failure (Porubský et al., 2016).

The Unfulfilled Ambitions of the 2008 Curriculum Reform

The School Act 2008 (Act No. 245/2008 of Coll.) became a tool of curriculum change and was adopted as the starting point of system transformation. Despite this, the implementation phase of the reform process was underestimated and characterized by a high degree of formalism (Porubský et al., 2016). Based on the work by Hayward (2010), it is clear that in Slovakia, the transmissive model of change concept dissemination was applied, narrowing the conception of reform to change at the level of goals and contents of school education. Also, the implementation strategy was built on the belief that the dissemination of information alone was sufficient to induce change. The concept of

transformation, which is a more complex and more collaborative concept (Hayward, 2010), was not applied and this caused several problems.

The key concept on which educational change was based under the 2008 Act was the two-level curriculum designed to ensure the autonomy of schools and teachers. The intended purpose was to decentralize curriculum policy and thus to incorporate the respect of specific conditions of schools in curriculum development. Thus, schools and teachers were given the possibility to develop, in a limited extent, their own school curricula and also syllabi on subjects previously developed centrally and binding to all. However, they were not prepared for the role of being thereby the autonomous authors of school curricula, nor were they identified with the role (Kosová & Trnka, 2018). They were also not prepared for the fundamental change in approaches to implementation of teaching strategies that require educational goals set to develop key competencies of students (Porubský et al., 2016). That is to say, since the 18th century, teachers of this region have been perceived as "civil servants" with the responsibility to consistently implement the state education policy (regardless of the political regime's character) and fulfil the state-prescribed curriculum. In such a situation, the applied transmissive model of the dissemination of the change concept could not succeed. The expectations of the 2008 Act were not met.

Fullan's True and the Responses of Slovakian Teachers

As mentioned above, the reason for the failure of the 2008 curriculum reform was the underestimation of the nature and complexity of its implementation phase. According to Fullan (2007), to achieve real educational change, its three dimensions must be completed: The first is that new or revised curriculum materials are introduced. The second is the implementation of new teaching approaches. The third dimension, which is the most difficult to implement, is changing people's beliefs in the curriculum they are teaching. Of these three dimensions, only two were partially implemented within the 2008 reform of the Slovak curriculum. There was no implementation of new teaching approaches and no policy to ensure changes in people's beliefs. The real impact of the reform on the instruction process was minimal. However, it cannot be said that it had no effect; it had a considerable impact on teachers' thinking and attitudes.

The vast majority of teachers in Slovakia assumed a sceptical, even negative, attitude toward the reform. Insecurity, tensions, and contradictions are, according to Burner (2018), to a certain extent, natural elements of change. However, as Dinham (2000) claims "negative attitudes may be not only responses to change itself but also to the way that change is introduced, with understanding, direction, commitment, time, and resources being lacking" (p. 32). This was also confirmed by the results of the research carried out ten years after the adoption of the School Act 2008. It was shown that the Slovak teachers were not open to further changes in the curriculum. Their attitudes here were largely influenced by the directive, unmanaged, hectic, and formal implementation process of reform in 2008

(Kosová & Trnka, 2018). As a result, they manifested all responses to mandated change as defined by Clement (2014):

1) negative emotions, including frustration, anger, annoyance, anxiety, and erosion of teachers' sense of self-efficacy;
2) lack of opportunity for meaning-making – to explore new ideas in relation to their own ideology;
3) disregard – teachers, often because of past experience, tend to view mandated changes as transitory, and expect them to be replaced by other initiatives in the near future.

A considerable number of Slovak teachers ignored real changes, assuming that they were temporary and would change again after the next parliamentary elections (Kosová & Trnka, 2018). A resistance to changes persists, and its potential development may complicate future reform processes.

Why Examine the Ideas of Reform Actors About Successful Educational Change?

Currently, the Slovak educational system faces two pressing tasks. The first is to complete the hitherto failed implementation of the 2008 curriculum reform by ensuring the real autonomy of schools to develop, implement, and institutionalize the new school curriculum. The second is about the necessity of maintaining the effectiveness of the functioning of the Slovak education system on a global scale. It means the state must embark on the fourth wave of educational change (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009), combining a top-down national vision, government steering, and support with professional involvement and public engagement. Precisely, the professional involvement and public engagement that have not been so far applied in Slovakia when initiating educational reform, despite the fact that they are fundamental for formation of the so-called guiding coalition characterized by Levin and Fullan (2008) as a strategy with one of key inhibiting factors of which is a more complex approach shared by many leaders simultaneously for its use to spread and be consistent. For such a transformation strategy that combines top-down and bottom-up approaches to be successful, it is necessary instead of continually pushing change, to pull change, which means drawing people in to what interests them and challenging them through leadership (Burner, 2018). Its starting point is, in addition to the formulation of a national vision, knowledge of how educational change is envisaged by those actors whose tasks will be to implement projected changes at the national level.

The Research Problem and Objective of This Study

In 2023, Slovakia is again confronting the challenge of curricular reform. There is a chance to learn from the mistakes of the 2008 Act, to avoid formalism, and to leave the transmissive model of change introduction, which, as we have mentioned above, narrows down the concept of the reform to make changes on the level of aims and contents of school education. The experience has shown that without a more complex and more collaborative

concept of transformation, there cannot be any change in the thinking of teachers or any real changes in everyday school practice. The success of other reform plans will be derived from the desire to listen to the voice of those who will implement them. Therefore, it is crucial to answer the question of how the participants in education reflect on the reform.

We have decided to react to this important aspect of the successful reform by our research and the presentation of its findings in this paper. The aim of the investigation was to find out what ideas the actors in implementation of educational change has about successful curriculum reform, what attributes they assign to it, and what characteristics of successful curriculum reform dominate their ideas.

Methodology

The study presents the results of mixed research using the Q method based on the incorporation of quantitative analysis of data with a qualitative interpretive framework (Stephenson in Stenner & Stainton, 2004). According to Bianchi et al. (1999) this technique is suitable for research on constructions of social objects, ways of understanding social aspects, social interventions, etc. Its result is the acquisition of various patterns reflecting the cultural understanding of these social phenomena. The strength of the Q-methodology is the possibility of revealing preferential opinion systems that could not be otherwise expressed by participants (Baker et al., 2010).

Participants

The research sample consisted of 46 participants. They were actors (teachers, school management, and pedagogical leaders) at various levels (public/state, private, nongovernmental sectors) actively participating in the ongoing discussion on the quality of education in Slovakia. We followed the rule of the greatest variance (Lukšík, 2013) so that it reflected the most diverse possible range of actors, while following also the rule developed by Stenner and Stainton (2004) of ensuring the number of participants was lower than the number of items. Table 1 presents an overview of their contextual characteristics. Data was collected online through the Q-assessor.com server (The Epimetrics Group, LLC, 2010–21).

Our intention when compiling the Q-set was to obtain the most diverse possible range of statements from an ecologically valid discourse for the field studied. Statements were collected through online forms where actors completed any number of unfinished sentences of the wording. *Educational change that can improve the school system is...*

Table 1

Characteristics of the Participants

Gender	Man (18); Woman (28)
Age	30 (1), 31 (1), 32 (1), 34 (1), 36 (1), 38 (2), 39 (2), 41 (1), 42 (2), 43 (2), 44 (2), 45 (5), 47 (3), 50 (4), 51 (1), 53 (1), 54 (1), 55 (1), 56 (1), 57 (3), 59 (1), 60 (2), 61 (1), 62 (2), 63 (2), 64 (1), 65 (1).
Education	Higher education, teaching branch of study (31); Higher education, non-teaching pedagogical branch of study (5); No pedagogical education (7); Supplementary pedagogical study (2); not given (1)
Sector (participant's position that allows him/her to actively influence the state of the education system)	Public/state (32); Private (4); Non-governmental (9); Not given (1)
Experience with a foreign education system	Yes, less than six months (14); Yes, more than six months (3); Yes, more than a year (5); Many years (10); No (14)

Procedure and Data Analysis

The statements were modified so that (1) they were understandable; (2) they had a sufficient differentiating value; (3) they contained only one information value; and (4) the meanings were not repeated. The final set consisted of 55 statements for which a quasi-normal distribution matrix was created, with a steeper distribution of data on a bipolar scale. The scale range (11 points) and slope followed specific recommendations (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

Table 2

Distribution of Items in the Quasinormal Distribution Matrix

I fully agree	+4	+3	+2	+1	neither/nor	-1	-2	-3	-4	I fully disagree
	2	3	4	6	8	9	8	6	4	3	2

Notes: The first line is the reference scale on which statements were to be differentiated (5 I fully agree – the statement describes me the best, 0 – vague statement (neither nor) - 5 – I fully disagree, the statement describes me the least. The second line represents the number of statements to be placed in the matrix.

The results were processed by inverted factor analysis with varimax rotation in the online program Q-assessor. 5 factors were identified. Participants were assigned to factors by: (1) the value of loading coefficient greater than 0.40 (Watts & Stenner, 2005); (2) the Fuerntratt criterion taking into account also the value of communality (h^2), similarity to all participants in factors and to the loading coefficient. Interpretation of individual factors followed the highest and lowest Z-score values, and also the condition of Watts

and Stenner (2005) was fulfilled of eigenvalue higher than 1.00 and the condition of at least two participants per factor. Furthermore, Kaiser's rule was taken into account, according to which factors with eigenvalues 1 were chosen that had differentiating strengths of individual variables in the value of at least 1 variable (Kaiser, 1991).

Results

Five factors were identified (A, B, C, E, and F) and the total deviation was 46.2135. All factors were standard. Table 3 presents the significant results of the factor analysis. Participants who did not meet the condition of Fuerntratt's criterion were not included in the table.

Table 3

Rotated Factors

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	h^2
ID 2	0.43	0.13	0.21	0.00	0.08	0.59*	0.04	0.61
ID 3	0.17	0.55*	0.06	-0.01	0.39	0.18	0.05	0.53
ID 5	0.08	0.62*	-0.11	0.05	0.06	0.08	-0.01	0.42
ID 6	0.58*	0.21	0.42	-0.08	0.01	0.21	-0.02	0.61
ID 7	0.38	0.10	-0.11	0.12	0.19	0.51*	0.05	0.49
ID 8	0.61*	0.23	-0.09	0.03	-0.05	0.15	-0.07	0.48
ID 9	0.02	0.31	-0.09	0.05	0.51*	0.10	0.00	0.38
ID 11	0.12	0.55*	0.08	-0.06	-0.15	0.13	-0.11	0.39
ID 12	0.61*	0.28	0.14	-0.03	0.41	0.06	0.02	0.65
ID 14	0.50*	0.01	0.23	-0.03	0.25	0.10	0.00	0.38
ID 16	0.21	0.67*	0.13	-0.05	0.19	0.23	0.02	0.61
ID 18	0.30*	0.05	0.10	-0.01	0.02	0.24	0.01	0.17
ID 19	-0.02	0.26	0.29*	-0.07	0.07	0.05	-0.00	0.17
ID 20	0.10	0.78*	-0.03	0.08	0.24	0.05	0.02	0.68
ID 22	0.04	0.26	0.29	-0.07	0.10	0.52*	-0.03	0.44
ID 24	0.14	0.36	0.21	-0.07	0.19	0.52*	0.00	0.51
ID 25	0.22	0.67*	-0.28	0.17	0.19	0.26	0.03	0.71
ID 26	0.17	0.23	0.31	-0.05	0.65*	0.10	-0.00	0.63
ID 27	0.19	0.0	0.71*	-0.01	-0.03	0.17	-0.00	0.57
ID 28	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.00	0.03	0.47*	0.00	0.27
ID 29	-0.03	-0.35	0.65*	0.13	0.00	0.22	-0.02	0.62
ID 34	0.53*	0.16	-0.14	0.07	0.26	0.04	0.00	0.4176

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	h^2
ID 35	0.14	0.18	0.06	-0.00	0.58*	0.06	-0.00	0.4043
ID 36	0.07	0.15	0.57*	-0.05	0.36	0.17	0.02	0.5278
ID 37	0.11	0.49*	0.13	-0.03	0.26	0.08	0.04	0.3607
ID 38	0.36*	0.22	0.19	-0.05	0.14	0.02	0.03	0.2471
ID 39	0.05	-0.16	0.13	0.07	0.29	0.46*	-0.01	0.3598
ID 40	0.11	-0.08	0.29	-0.02	0.46*	0.21	-0.01	0.3707
ID 45	0.21	0.54*	0.12	-0.04	0.12	0.10	0.02	0.3836
ID 46	-0.10	0.20	0.10	-0.02	0.09	0.44*	-0.06	0.2736
Eigenvalues	4.5369	5.4252	3.1000	0.3374	3.3303	4.4689	0.0595	-
% Total Variance	9.8628	11.7939	6.7391	0.7335	7.2398	9.7150	0.1293	46.2135

Note. Participants who did not meet the condition of the Fuerntratt's criterion were not displayed; * – significant by the Fuerntratt's criterion; h^2 – communality; ID – number of participants.

In the description phase, factor maps of meanings were created based on items with their placements in a given factor considerably different from their placements in other factors (Z-score). Next, semantic contexts were searched for between strong statements in a factor (items placed in extreme positions). This interpretation procedure can be called the "bottom-up" procedure, since it was primarily a heuristic search for connections between individual statements and naming these connections (Lukšík, 2013). Five descriptions of successful curriculum reform were created in this way. They are presented in Tables 4–8 along with an overview of the characteristics of the participants associated with the factors.

Table 4

Factor A Responding to Global Changes

Participants associated with the factor	Description
9.8628 % of the total variance and eigenvalue was 4.5369. 7 participants. The factor was associated with the following characteristics: (Gender) (4) men and (3) women; (Age) (30, 34, 38, 39, 43, 50, 61 years old); (Education): (3) higher education, teaching branch of study; (1) higher education, nonteaching pedagogical branch of study; (2) no pedagogical education; (1) missing; (Sector) (4) public/state, (3) non-governmental; (Experience with a foreign education system) (4) many years, (1) more than one year, (1) less than 6 months, (1) none.	Curriculum reform should respond to the requirements of our time, contribute to sustainable development, as well as to the solution of global crises. It should be the answer to various social problems and challenges such as deepening social inequities. It should also create conditions for the development of skills allowing individuals to fluently pass through the education system and later stand up to an ever-changing labour market environment. It supports the networking of teachers and schools in order to increase the quality of education and spread good practice.

Table 5

Factor B Respecting Various Educational Needs of Children

Participants associated with the factor	Description
11.7939% of the total variance and eigenvalue was 5.4252. 8 participants. The factor was associated with the following characteristics: (Gender) (4) men and (4) women; (Age) (3) 45, (39, 42, 57, 63, 64 years old); (Education): (7) higher education, teaching branch of study; (1) higher education, non-teaching pedagogical branch of study; (Sector) (6) public/state, (2) non-governmental; (Experience with a foreign education system) (2) many years, (1) more than one year, (2) less than 6 months, (3) none.	Curriculum reform should create conditions for the application of key principles of equal chances in education. It is built on the basic premise that every child has abilities and talents. It should massively support individualization in education, this by adjustment of curriculum as well as by mechanisms of decentralization and involvement of a higher number of specialists (special education teachers, psychologists, social workers, etc.) in children's education. It is a hope for vulnerable groups of the population and an opportunity for them to improve their chances for a better life.

Table 6

Factor C Consensual, Explaining, Underpinned by a Thorough Knowledge of Problems of School Practice

Participants associated with the factor	Description
6.7391 % of the total variance and eigenvalue was 3.1000. 4 participants. The factor was associated with the following characteristics: (Gender) (1) man and (3) women; (Age) 45, 47, 55, 60 years old); (Education): (4) higher education, teaching branch of study; (Sector) (4) public/state; (Experience with a foreign education system): (2) less than 6 months, (2) none.	Curriculum reform should be first and foremost an answer to real problems of school practice, or a response to reform impulses from below. Its vision should be built on a dialogue with teachers and monitoring of schools' needs. It should be phased over stages and open to comments also in the process of implementation. It should be in the hands of capable leaders perceiving teachers as partners and are able to provide both meaningful explanations of changes and support at their introduction.

Table 7

Factor E Pragmatic, Well Thought Out and Sustainable

Participants associated with the factor	Description
7.2398% of the total variance and eigenvalue was 3.3303. 4 participants. The factor was associated with the following characteristics: (Gender) (1) man and (3) women; (Age) 36, 44, 51, 62 years old); (Education): (2) higher education, teaching branch of study; (2) without pedagogical education; (Sector) (2) public/state; (2) non-governmental; (Experience with a foreign education system): (1) more than one year, (1) many years, (2) none.	Curriculum reform should bring changes that will improve a person's preparation for the present, but especially for an uncertain future. It requires not only responsible training but, above all, the holistic development of the person. It is important that it is thoroughly thought out and planned so that its continuity is ensured. At the same time, it should be flexible, based on the vision of continuous evaluation with teachers as major actors, and on prediction of potential risks.

Table 8

Factor F Fundamental and Responsible

Participants associated with the factor	Description
9.7150% of the total variance and eigenvalue was 4.4689. 7 participants. The factor was associated with the following characteristics: (Gender) (2) men and (5) women; (Age) 56, 57, 60, 62, 63, 65 years old); (Education): (6) higher education, teaching branch of study; (1) higher education, nonteaching pedagogical branch of study; (Sector): (6) public/state; (1) non-governmental; (Experience with a foreign education system): (1) more than one year, (1) many years, (2) none, (3) less than 6 months.	Curriculum reform should not pursue economic goals and financial effectiveness. It should be a return to the fundamental sense of general education, thus a return to real values. Values should create the basic framework of a comprehensive and consensually adopted vision of education, as well as guarantee the continuity of reform changes and preparation of a person for an uncertain future. It should be prepared responsibly and based on knowledge of the reform process theory and practice, as well as knowledge of problems of practice. The success of reform should be ensured also by a meaningful link with the training of future teachers at higher education institutions.

Discussion

As already mentioned in the introduction, the impulses for curriculum reform are various. Several authors agree that one of them is increased globalization that changes the context in which we live (Burner, 2018; Carnoy & Rhoten, 2013; Štech, 2013; McGinn, 1999; Sahlberg, 2006; and others). There is a strongly resonating requirement for economic prosperity and sustainable development; therefore, "most countries adjust their education systems to respond to fit new economic realities and social challenges" (Sahlberg, 2006, p. 263). Education for the knowledge-based economy has become a buzz phrase in global education policy discourse (ibid.). In this discourse, education is viewed not only as an instrument for the increase of economic prosperity, but also as an instrument for the elimination of social inequities that are harmful to economic development. As asserts Sahlberg (2006), people are perceived as human capital or as a stock of educated citizens with well-developed skills, thanks to which they can stand up to the labour market and thus contribute to economic growth, but also to solutions to global crises. As a result, the curriculum changes into the so-called "enterprise curriculum" defined by key competencies (Kaščák & Pupala, 2012). The "product" of school should be a flexible, creative, innovative individual, not relying on a stable qualification, but prepared for change and solution of complex problem situations (Štech, 2013). The content of education, but also the teaching and learning organization, is penetrated by clustering and networking as additional important instruments of economic competitiveness (Sahlberg, 2006). Many of these signs are present in the description covered by the name *Responding to global changes* (Factor A – Table 4). The description reflects the arrangement of the statements in which the accent on the target orientation of the reform

dominates. In this group of views, reform is perceived as an instrument for the solution of global problems such as deepening social inequities or ecological crises. Discourse on the return of investments into lower education levels (see Cunha et al., 2006; Naudeau et al., 2011; OECD, 2012) is manifested by the high Z-score of the statement emphasizing the need to create conditions for a good start at the threshold of education for all children. The description resonates with the requirement to ensure sustainable development with emphasis on successful entry and retention in the rapidly changing labour market, as well as with the need for school networking in order to increase their quality or even competitiveness.

Some of the signs of successful reform mentioned above can also be found in the Factor E description (Table 7). They are expressed by the pragmatic attribute, by which respondents refer to the conjunctural justification of the need for curriculum change (Štech, 2013). In this case, it is the expectation that, thanks to the reform school will be able to prepare every person for life in an uncertain future, support his/her complex development so that s/he can successfully pass through the education system and live a happy life at the "time of liquid modernity" (Bauman, 2005). However, other signs of successful reform are also included in the description. They are represented by well-thought-out and sustainable attributes. They communicate the need through planning and phasing the change process over stages. The description also contains a call for stability, the best representation of which may be the statement: It can survive a political cycle of one government. Dominating statements include also attributes of sustainability loaded in the definitions by Fullan (2005) or Hargreaves and Fink (2006). According to Fullan, the concept of sustainability expresses "the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose" (2005, p. ix). The search for the purpose of the changes that are introduced reflects the requirement of continuous evaluation and openness towards change. Hargreaves and Fink emphasize that sustainability is not just about whether something will last but also about close monitoring of impacts of changes and asking the question "how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment now and in the future" (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 30). These elements of meaning are captured in the statement where such reform is considered to be successful, which is based on the prediction of potential risks.

In Slovakia, frustration from relentless efforts to reform curricula with no visible outcomes also raises questions about school values and functions. Such questions seem to resonate in the minds of participants falling into Factor F (Table 8). They are characterized by an older age and less experience with foreign education systems. In their view, such curriculum reform is successful that is fundamental and responsible. The description contains the belief that curriculum changes cannot be motivated by economic growth and economic goals and effectiveness cannot be raised to the highest principle. The description evokes the feeling of a return to the fundamental sense of general education and the justification of the principles of the curriculum. Although this description, too (as well as the description of Factor A), emphasizes preparation of children for life in the rapidly changing world, in

this case, it is rather an expectation that curriculum in its flexibility and width allows for learning aesthetic, moral values, values of truth or self-realization. If education is built on learning cultural values, according to Štech (2013), there must be strong reasons for curriculum change. According to the author, it concerns, namely, cultural change, presuming deep analysis and debate about consequences of such a change. This dimension of thinking manifests itself in the strong inclination of the participants to the assertion that reform should be based on a comprehensive and consensually adopted vision of the school system and education. Additionally, participants call for knowledge of the theory and practice of the reform process. A compelling reference to consistent implementation can be found in the assertion that such curriculum reform is successful and is linked with the higher education system for training future teachers.

Not only the description of Factor F, but also the arrangement of statements in Factor C (Table 6) suggests a critical reflection of reform attempts made so far in Slovakia. Reform success is perceived here through consensual, explaining attributes based on a thorough knowledge of school practice problems. It is actually a refusal of another so-called mandated change (also referred to as an external approach, or top-down change), which Clement (2014) explains as a change that is initiated at the government or bureaucratic level and transmitted to schools with teachers being more or less notified of it. As illustrated in the introduction to this paper, the manner in which curriculum reform was introduced in 2008 was problematic. Teachers lacked support when solving problems, they felt and perceived as pressing, while also facing a high number of new bureaucratic requirements. Resistance, as a natural accompanying sign of any reform, could grow even into scepticism or mistrust in any change from above. Based on this description, it can be argued that in Slovakia a certain part of the professional public considers only such reform to be successful if it arises as an impulse from the levels of teachers, schools, or self-governments, or as change reflecting actual problems of school practice. Also, in line with Levin and Fullan (2008), two-way communication about successes and challenges can be considered a sign of good reform (Levin & Fullan, 2008). Reform is perceived as the relationship between action and reaction, which requires, among other things, the openness of policy makers to learn from mistakes (McGinn, 1999) and a willingness to ask teachers whether they understand the proposed changes and what support they need in the implementation phase (O'Day et al., 1995).

The last description (Factor B – Table 5) describes successful curriculum reform through the principles of inclusive education. A requirement comes to the fore: to respect children's various educational needs. The description calls for higher flexibility of curriculum in its whole width and for massive support of individualization in education with confidence that every child has abilities and talents. It communicates a need for higher representation of specialists (psychologists, special education teachers, social workers, etc.) in schools, as well as a need for decentralization. Reform thus conceived is an opportunity for the more intense integration of groups of children at risk (children from minorities, children with disabilities, children from socially excluded locations, etc.) into mainstream schools. It may

be a response to the little-supported inclusion policy at the national level (see Miškolci, 2016; Kasčák & Pupala, 2013), subsequently poorly developed inclusive practice (see Kusá & Juščáková, 2017; Hapalová, 2019; Miškolci et al., 2017), as well as the long-term tradition of educating SEN children in a stream of special schools, evoking, against the background of the global discussion about the need to equalize educational opportunities, a need for change.

Conclusions

The research findings presented here confirm that the world of knowledge and consciousness is a world of consensuality and narrative. Exploring ideas about signs of successful educational change can also lead to the conclusion that views on this issue differ. Our research identified five different concepts of thinking. We found that implementors of reform efforts (teachers, school management representatives, and pedagogical leaders) consider curriculum reform to be successful if:

(1) It reflects global problems, current social challenges, labour market dynamics, and supports the networking of schools and teachers (Reform Responding to Global Changes);

(2) It places emphasis on equality of chances in education and creates conditions for individualization of education (Reform Respecting Various Educational Needs of Children);

(3) It responds to actual needs of school practice, is sensitive to impulses from below, perceives teachers as partners, providing them with explanations and support (Consensual, Explaining, Underpinned by a Thorough Knowledge of Problems of School Practice);

(4) It is thoroughly thought-out, aimed at pragmatic targets of preparing people both for the present and the future (Pragmatic, Well Thought out, Sustainable);

(5) It is a return to the fundamental sense of education and real values, built on knowledge of the reform process theory and practice (Fundamental and Responsible).

Our findings indicate clearly that the voice of reform implementors cannot be ignored. Particular descriptions are important impulses for the initiation and implementation, as well as for the institutionalisation of the curricular changes. A responsible and constructive dialogue with implementors is necessary where the country requires an essential intervention into the curricular policy at the state level. It is the only way to stop rising resistance to curriculum change. The results of future curriculum reform in Slovakia will depend on an ability to reflect maturely on past mistakes.

Acknowledgments

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Sėkmingų švietimo pokyčių požymiai reformų fone

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Santrauka

Švietimo sistemų tobulinimas yra pasaulinis reiškinys. Per pastaruosius kelis dešimtmečius buvome dinamiškų švietimo sistemų pokyčių visuose žemynuose liudininkai. Slovakija priklauso šalims, kuriose švietimo pokyčiai nebuvo sėkmingai valdomi iki galo. Paskutinė 2008 m. ugdymo programų reforma patvirtino Fullano 3 dimensijų teoriją. Nepakankamas reformos proceso įgyvendinimo etapo įvertinimas lemia nesėkmę. Nesėkmingas bandymas vėliau gilina nusivylimą ir padidina mokytojų pasipriešinimą pokyčiams. Tyrimo tikslas – išsiaiškinti, kokios yra švietimo pokyčių įgyvendinimo dalyvių (mokytojų, mokyklų vadovybės ir kitų vadovų) idėjos Slovakijoje sėkmingai ugdymo turinio reformai kurti ir įgyvendinti. Taikant Q metodologijos kiekybinį-kokybinį tyrimo dizainą, buvo identifikuoti penki skirtingi nuomonių klasteriai. Tyrimas rodo, kad sėkmingų švietimo pokyčių požymiai turėtų būti: 1) reagavimas į globalius pokyčius; 2) vaikų su įvairiais ugdymosi poreikias gerbimas; 3) sutarimas, paremtas nuodugniu mokyklos praktikos problemų išmanymu; 4) pragmatiškumas ir tvarumas; 5) fundementalumas ir atsakingumas. Pateikti tyrimo rezultatai patvirtina faktą, kad žinių ir sąmonės pasaulis yra bendras ir naratyvus pasaulis net ir santykyje su sėkmingų švietimo pokyčių požymių idėjų tyrinėjimu. Tai reiškia būtinybę atsižvelgti į švietimo pokyčių dalyvių nuomones, kurios šiame tyrime ir pateiktos kaip vienas iš galimų būdų.