

REVIEWS

More than Group Work: Socialization - Thoughts about the Methodological Book of K. Nagy Emese

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K. Nagy Emese's methodological book (titled *More than group work*) was published in 2012 in Hungary by the National School Book Publisher. As the title shows, the book written for the teaching community and the educational experts is not simply the presentation of the group work-based - American pedagogical innovation: the Complex Instruction Program (CIP), but it has greater importance. The work helps the interpretation and the systematization of the contemporary Hungarian social processes, and offers possibilities for the teacher to moderate them, as well by presenting the philosophy, the working processes and the practical steps of CIP developed by a team of teachers led by K. Nagy Emese in Northern Hungary (in Hejőkeresztúr).

The Complex Instruction Program – based on twenty years of research - was originally developed at Stanford University by Elizabeth Cohen and Rachel Lotan.

A key feature of the American methodological construction is that the sessions provided by the teachers are organized around a central theme with a lot of open-ended solutions. Therefore, the competition between the children is excluded, because every student group has the opportunity to work on the different aspects of the central theme. Furthermore, in such a way the group work ensures the possibilities for further construction of individual projects, as well.

During the group work the teacher deliberately modifies - on the basis of the results of a previous survey - the children's hierarchical system and their status differences by problem solving tasks and the rotation of the students' roles. During the group work the students get into lower or more prestigious roles as well. By the rotational work the appreciation of those students who are

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marginalized in the traditional educational practice also grows, while it reduces the personal conflicts between the children. This methodological consideration of the Complex Instruction Program can contribute to the repairing of the interactions between the Roma and the non-Roma children in the Central and Eastern European region.

The importance of the adaptation of the American Complex Instruction Program in Hejőkeresztúr lies in the characteristics of its context. The small village is located in that county (Borsod-Abaúj- Zemplén) of Northern Hungary whose central town (Miskolc) was a socialist industrial center until 1989. Miskolc absorbed the layers of the unskilled and (compared to the national average) largely overrepresented Roma population in the labor market. The situation was not different in the case of Hejőkeresztúr, because it is the part of the catchment area of Miskolc.

According to general Hungarian trends, the regime changes in 1989 brought the collapse of the socialist industrial production being replaced by a competitive and a knowledge-based market economy and labor market. Therefore the first big losers of the new democracy were those unskilled Roma people whose majority still lives in the agglomeration of the citadel of Northern Hungary. The majority of these people are still unemployed and afflicted by a very overt racial discrimination since decades that leads to personal, social, economic and other conflicts in the concerned area.

In this context, the application of the American Complex Instruction Program has extreme importance. The teacher community, led by K. Nagy Emese, is able to demonstrate significant results against the large number of pedagogical failures in the IV. Béla Elementary District School.

In such conditions, the book is particularly exciting for me. Besides the progressive and modern interpretations of the functions of the education and the educational institutions, it offers such methodological alternatives with adequate pedagogical tools that make the Hungarian application of the CIP highly credible.

The great importance of the work (*More than group work*) lies in the following. It is not only based on the results of the advanced pedagogical way of thinking about the methodological issues, but it highlights their 'in practice' considerations while the elements of the Complex Instruction Program are presented. It examines the aspects of the human rights and sociology, as well, being demanded for decades.

K. Nagy Emese's book breaks with the approach that expects the Hungarian educational system to treat and educate children in such a way that is similar to the line production in factories. Her work states clearly that the Hungarian educational system needs fundamental reforms both in structure and in thinking. One of the most significant suggestions of the book is that it does not separate the educational processes from the social processes. Preferably, it accepts, measures and interprets the current contexts and considers the educational

institutions to be the socialization agent of the social interactions and influence existing within and breathing with the everyday life of the society.

It is not surprising that *More than group work* breaks with the approach that measures the children's achievements exclusively on the basis of the extent and the level of the crammed information and facts of the textbooks. The author explains that the school is a socializing medium preparing for the future and dealing with the questions: how and in what way can bring up such generations whose members are able to be more efficient in the cooperation instead of the stepping on someone's heel by flaunting the personal knowledge. In that way in an educational institution - besides the accumulation of knowledge - children also learn how to cooperate with each other regardless to the origin or the social and other disadvantages.

K. Nagy Emese in the *More than group work* practically scrutinizes all relevant viewpoints that – in my opinion - are needed if a teacher would like to get high quality results besides the contemporary Hungarian social conditions.

The author of the presented book fully explains the concept of the deprivation and its results concerning its negative effects on the social and the personal interactions. The author also describes how the social status or the origin can influence a child's status in the classroom, and reveals the fact that one of the most important elements of the Complex Instruction Program - as it was mentioned in the introduction – is the handling of the status problems: namely by the avoidance of the conflicts generating competitions that regularly reflect the social and the ethnic fault lines, with the help of a method in which everybody has to perform in a versatile way and meets a wide variety of roles but never in the same form because all children have to learn that everyone can have a higher or lower status, everyone is good at something and can be more successful if the personal tasks are solved on the basis of the group work.

There is an extremely important aspect in K. Nagy Emese's book that in the *More than group work* repeatedly turns out. The methodology of the Complex Instruction Program can be a supporting tool for the democratic societies. One of the basic features of the CIP is that it socializes between the walls of the school. The children learn to build and accept the democratic way of the relationships and the democratic way of the personal interactions which - according to the author of this paper – helps the well-functioning democracies to ensure the growth of those democrat citizens who cooperate with each other; or in the case of those countries where there are errors in the functioning of democracy the CIP brings mental clarity through the activities of the growing generations by showing concrete and positive economic or social results.

In the case of the *More than group work* it cannot be ignored that the author offers not only progressive social and pedagogical approaches with the presented educational, theoretical and methodological backgrounds but it provides significant assistance for those educators, teaching communities, managers and researchers who have enough entrepreneurship, commitment and dedication to

the methodological innovation of the teaching profession because the book offers the detailed analysis of the organizational, planning and measurement stages of the Complex Instruction Program which is, in addition, is accompanied (in the spirit of the scientific accuracy) by the measuring instruments, data sheets, lesson plans, and helps planning and monitoring processes by practical aspects. These materials can help any teaching community being devoted to follow and apply the method in practice similarly to the smooth operating practice of the IV. Béla Elementary District School in Hejőkeresztúr.

It cannot be ignored that K. Nagy Emese as a practicing director, the implementer of the CIP, and as an organizer makes it clear that the Complex Instruction Program is not only a pedagogical methodology but also an enterprise to make the educators be able to contribute to the effective shaping of our contemporary society. These intentions require a high level of commitment, competence, accuracy, and efforts along with the help of a professional leader.

The author of the *More than group work* does not hide that the application of the Complex Instruction Program does not allow a “relaxed pace of work” associated with the practice of the frontal teaching. Furthermore, she adds that when the project operates smoothly, and the teaching community is organized around the Complex Instruction Program then the overall effect of the Complex Instruction Program, which is based on the group work, will influence the thinking of the colleagues making the teachers’ work easier, if for no other reason, because of the cooperation for the common goals, and for the reduction of the conflicts generating competitive situations, by resulting in high professional results and positive feedback.

It is also the merit of the book that K. Nagy Emese did not keep back the disagreement of her colleagues concerning the philosophy of the CIP, and she has the courage to offer professional arguments supporting the implementation of CIP.

Furthermore, it is also important to emphasize that the *More than group work* has other merits as well. The author is able to remain correct and objective while offering the Complex Instruction Program. K. Nagy Emese does not want to chase and force this pedagogical methodology as the one and only in a bigoted way.

The book reveals that K. Nagy Emese is aware of the fact that the presented type of socialization that can be effectively supported by the CIP cannot be the sole purpose of an educational institution.

Along with its benefits, the author sees the complexity of the teaching methodologies as well. She emphasizes that the Complex Instruction Program is not the sole remedy for the conflict management originating from disadvantages. Depending on the situation and the curriculum, the frontal education, the pair or the individual work can also be applied in the classroom. The author indirectly reveals for the professional communities that the CIP is a teaching methodology

that is suitable for the treatment of a well-defined problem area. Although, it cannot be forgotten that not all phenomena can be handled by the CIP.

She also suggests to the teaching communities that by evaluating their problems they should use varied and mixed educational methods during the whole academic year because the poorly stimulated period in education has expired when one kind of teaching method met the given social needs.

Perhaps this is one of the most important messages of the book. In a complex, globalizing world the teachers should not apply solely reductionist and world simplifying pedagogical tools because the children's progress requires the response of the educational institutions to each impulse that concern them. This can only be achieved if a teaching staff uses – at the same time – a complex methodology in the classroom work.

The *More than group work* – for the author of this essay - is particularly important because he is convinced that the Complex Instruction Program's status managing function appears very strongly and with similar results in the case of the Learning Center-model (Learning Center of Budaörs Public Utility Foundation) and in the case of the Roma Mentor Project (Weöres Sándor Elementary School, Arnót - Open Society Institute).

And last but not least, the book is important for the author of this study because in Bátonyterenye, in the former Erkel Ferenc Elementary School (headed by the director Tibor Kovács) he could experience himself what the conscious management of the status problems means in practice: he was socialized in a Students' Republic, in a community, in which his Roma-Hungarian origin was not an obstacle to become the Minister of Communications. What is more, the direct change of hierarchy (i.e. at this time, the democratic rotation of the roles in the Students' Republic), also described by K. Nagy Emese, was suitable to reduce the long lasting conflicts with the class community. Instead of the marginalization to receive attention, he immersed in the writing and in the literature, became a teacher of Hungarian language and literature, and then became a journalist and a PhD. candidate in pedagogy writing educational criticism.

For my part – as the enjoyer of the benefits of the innovative pedagogical constructions - I think that the Complex Instruction Program is a model which can be very strongly suitable – with the appropriate teaching methods or pedagogical innovations - to strengthen the Central and Eastern European democracies by supporting the growing up of such generations to whom the multi-and intercultural public thinking, the tolerance, the empathy, the flexibility, the co-operation and the lifelong learning are natural, independently of the ethnicity, the creed, the economic position, the sexual orientation or the political party affiliation.