

## ROLES OF THE TEACHER IN CLASS OF CHILDREN WITH LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

© Laura FURCSA  
(Szent István University)

[Furcsa.Laura@abk.szie.hu](mailto:Furcsa.Laura@abk.szie.hu)

*This paper investigates the roles of the teacher of foreign languages in a class of children with low socio-background. Their relationships and interactions with children are dynamics which play a critical role in determining the success of the disadvantaged children. Although the identified role of the teacher is to teach foreign language skills, the teacher's role implies a wide range of other responsibilities. The methodology applied in the present research arises from the aim to explore in depth the experiences, views and perceptions of teachers.*

*For these reasons this study is primarily qualitative and uses interviewing as the main research tool for the collection of data. All language teachers in a small rural school of Hungary were interviewed, where more than 90 per cent of the children can be regarded as disadvantaged. Explicit and implicit references to teachers' roles were looked for in the responses. Data gathered through classroom observation helped to give a fuller picture. Categories were shaped to give an overview of the teachers' roles. Metaphors are used to label these categories. Through the cyclical process of data analysis, the following categories emerged: teacher as motivator, teacher as entertainer, teacher as facilitator, teacher as repeater, teacher as nurturer, teacher as controller, teacher as cooperator, teacher as assessor, teacher as expert, teacher as organiser, and teacher as martyr. Looking at educational problems and conflicts in the light of the role of the teacher might give ideas about possible ways to proceed.*

**Keywords:** language teaching, language pedagogy, disadvantaged children, low socio-economic background

The role of the teacher of foreign languages has become complex especially in the case of children coming from low socio-economic background as the comprehensive educational needs of these children offer a unique challenge. This holistic position considers numerous aspects of the children's needs to learn a foreign language. This complex view does not concentrate only on the methodological aspect of language teaching, other factors, like motivating, facilitating may influence the efficiency of teaching to a great extent. Teachers of disadvantaged children can promote personality development by providing material and activities in the classroom that will address some of the individuals' particular needs. Their relationships and interactions with children are dynamics which play a critical role in determining the success of the disadvantaged children. Successful language

learning may result in better general school performance and later in improved job prospects. However, teaching foreign languages to disadvantaged children is a neglected area of language pedagogy. This paper attempts to begin to fill that gap.

The aim of this study is to identify teachers' roles in a disadvantaged class. The analysis was done from the teachers' perspective. All language teachers (a teacher of English, German and Russian) in a small rural school of Hungary were interviewed, where more than 90 per cent of the children can be regarded as disadvantaged according to the headmistress. Explicit and implicit references to teachers' roles were looked for in the responses. Data gathered through classroom observation helped to give a fuller picture. In categorising the roles, metaphors described in Oxford et al. (1998) were used.

### Theoretical framework

When discussing the issue of disadvantage in education, it is of major importance to first define the key term *disadvantaged* as used in the present study, in order to establish a common understanding of how this term is viewed and interpreted in its complexity. It is followed by presenting current perspectives on the problems of disadvantaged children, touching on some empirical and theoretical issues. The theoretical framework of this research is multi-disciplinary: issues of minority pedagogy, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics are integrated.

The term *disadvantaged* denotes a very complex phenomenon in education, and is difficult to define not only owing to its complexity and also because a variety of terms are also used to refer to socially disadvantaged situations, e.g. at-risk students, students of low socio-economic status or vulnerable students. Disadvantaged situations cannot be defined by precise and unambiguous criteria. Family background, ethnic origin, the personal characteristics of the child, the school context and the social behaviour of children interrelate and generate conditions that place children at risk of failing to achieve their intellectual and academic potential, and having limits placed on their ability to function later as productive adults in society. A child's socio-economic status - determined by parents' income, occupation and education level - also exerts a powerful influence on the child's development. Turcsán (1998) selected the following decisive factors to describe the group of disadvantaged children: 1) *educational level of the parents*, 2) *family income and parents' employment status*, 3) *family size*, 4) *parents' deviancy*, and 5) *Roma origin*.

In several studies conducted in the United States, students who are defined as economically at-risk, are students whose family incomes qualify them to receive either free or reduced lunches (Rojewski, 1994; Bailey, 2006). The criteria are based on government established poverty guidelines and are set forth by federal vocational legislation in the United States Department of Agriculture's School Lunch Program. This data is readily available to school personnel.

Hungarian teachers' interpretation is primarily based on *Paragraph 121 Article 1 of Public Education Act LXXIX, 1993*, which states that children entitled to regular child protection allowance, children with multiple disadvantages and children whose parents' educational level does not exceed the primary school are considered disadvantaged. The present research focuses on two main factors: parents' educational level and unemployment

with special attention to children of Roma origin in underdeveloped rural areas.

### Educational problems of disadvantaged and minority children in school

A great proportion of children belonging to the Roma ethnicity can be regarded as socially disadvantaged (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2004). They are challenged by numerous difficulties in the Hungarian education system resulting in the unequal access to quality education. G. Fekete, Hargitai, Jász et al. (2006) stress the following obstructive factors Roma children are faced with in public education: inadequate conditions regarding school facilities, equipment and buildings, substandard education, undemanding requirements at school, less qualified teachers, the negative expectations of teachers, hidden curricula and inflexibility of the school system.

Kertesi and Kézdi (2004) investigate the process of school segregation when children whose families differ in socio-economic status or ethnicity are educated in separate schools or separate groups within schools. The free school choice system for elementary schools in Hungary reinforces segregation not only in bigger cities, but also in the provinces, as high-status children leave the small rural primary schools and commute to a larger settlement's school. As a result, the quality of education provided for the lower status children declines, which plays an important role in the reproduction of social inequalities.

Havas, Kemény and Liskó (2002) point out that teachers working with Roma children do not have adequate social sensitivity, moreover, their professional competence is lower than necessary. The reason for it lies in the fact that teaching Roma children is often seen as a 'punishment', and not as a new professional challenge. The decisive factor in the case of minority children's school performance lies in the preparedness of their teachers and their selection of the right pedagogical methods. The qualitative research conducted by Nagy (2002) into general educational problems of Roma children also underlines the importance of the teachers' personality and draws attention to the need for special teaching skills.

### The multiple source of disadvantage

Some theories emphasise language disadvantage in the case of children with low-socio economic background. The term does not necessarily mean a different mother tongue, it can also refer to a different version of the common language. Earlier studies suggest that working-class and minority children are deficient in language ability when compared to middle-class, mainstream children. Bernstein's sociolinguistic account of educational failure is based on pedagogic discourse (Bernstein, 1972). Studies based on Bernstein's theory were also conducted in Hungarian context, with similar findings emphasizing that pupils of the school in the best social situation produced speech which was elaborate, and situationally independent (Pap and Pléh, 1972, Oláh Örsi, 2005).

Since a major part of the disadvantaged children are of Roma origin, their disadvantaged situation is further complicated by aspects of language use. More than two-thirds of the Roma population in Hungary have the Hungarian language as their mother tongue (they are called the Romungro). The others are regarded as bilingual, speaking a Roma dialect, Olah or Boyash (an archaic Romanian dialect). The mother tongue correlates

negatively with school performance as the Olah or Boyash speaking children often start school without a proper knowledge of Hungarian (Kemény, 1996). The data of a nation-wide research project conducted in 1993 claim that 77% of Romungro, 58% of Boyash and only 52% of Olah speakers completed their primary school studies.

Linguistic socialisation of children coming from low socio-economic status or an ethnic group is often different from that of mainstream children, which may count as serious disadvantage at school. Heath (1986) discusses several ethnographic factors which influence linguistic socialization (literacy traditions, physical and social domains, life style, free time activities, communication network) when comparing different communities. Middle-class children are encouraged to get familiarised with literacy at an early age (bedtime stories, picture books, related activities). Réger (1987) supports this idea saying that Roma children have a communication and interaction style which is very different from the dominant pattern in school. Children living in traditional Roma communities in Hungary acquire the vivid verbal culture and narrative style (improvisative performance, interactive dialogues) through several verbal games, and role plays. She states that the merits of Roma speech are completely irrelevant, or even condemned in school, where classroom language may be totally different from the language children have acquired in the process of linguistic socialization at home. These differences have a very important effect on the child's verbal performance which is essential in foreign language learning. Indigenous techniques (role-play, songs, the telling of folktales, riddles and proverb) can be very motivating for disadvantaged children.

Learning to read and write in the first language influences success or failure with reading and writing in the second language. Good reading skills in the mother tongue is important as evidence can be found for the cross-linguistic transfer of native language skills to the foreign language (Dufva and Vauras, 2002), especially in regard to the reading skills and word recognition skills. Disadvantaged children are often reported to have poor reading performance in Hungarian (Havas, Kemény and Liskó, 2002). One reason for the poor school achievement of Roma children is the lack of literacy according to Réger (1987). In Roma families, there are very few literacy events, written language is hardly ever integrated in their oral culture. They use no books and book-related activities (questioning about books, conversational allusions to the content of books) with preschool children, there are few occasions for reading. Roma children who are not exposed to preliteracy experiences may be at a critical disadvantage later at school. Disadvantaged children are often brought up as illiterate or functionally illiterate parents' children, which increases the deficiency of the factual and linguistic knowledge, concepts as well as behaviour and interaction patterns that are necessary for successful reading skills. Teaching disadvantaged children to read in a second language should take into account these characteristics.

Disadvantaged children often have mild and moderate learning difficulties, e.g. short attention spans and a lack of concentration, memory problems, poor generalisation skills, sensory impairments (auditory or visual discrimination problems), a lack of imaginative thinking, poor eye-hand coordination, dyslexia and dysgraphia (Hodge, 1998). The identification of potential language-learning difficulties and the necessary compensatory strategies which aim at building and strengthening skills to acquire learning are difficult for language teachers without any special training. Special inclusive strategies and problem-solving approaches to differentiation should be adopted, and problems of cognitive process should be taken into account

when teaching a foreign language to children with special needs Tánzos (2006).

## Method

The methodology applied in the present research arises from the aim to explore in depth the experiences, views and perceptions of teachers of disadvantaged children. For these reasons this study is primarily qualitative and uses interviewing as the main research tool for the collection of data.

The two dominant forms of data collection associated with qualitative inquiry are interviews and observation. Standardized interviews with the language teachers of one particular school in a disadvantaged village of Hungary were used with broad open-ended questions which allow for individual variations in order to ensure that essentially the same information is obtained from every respondent.

Interview questions were created after reviewing relevant literature and results of previous research. The following domains were included: teachers' background and experience, strengths and weaknesses of the children (types of disadvantage), problems encountered when teaching, course material, classroom dynamics, evaluation, success of children, school context, teachers' professional development. Domains were written into a variety of interview questions and were grouped under appropriate concepts. A written guide including all verbal directions was prepared. At the beginning of each interview, I asked for permission to tape-record it and defined the term 'disadvantaged' as teachers tend to interpret it in totally different ways. In my analysis, children of socially disadvantaged background, especially of Roma ethnicity and children with special learning needs are regarded as disadvantaged. These structured interviews typically took one to two hours. The responses of all the three teachers were tape-recorded after gaining their permission to do so. Recorded interviews were transcribed to produce the exact words of the interviewees.

In this research, a multiple measuring instrument was used in order to triangulate the findings and ensure validity. Direct observations are needed both to give as complete a picture as possible and to provide information on what the teachers said in the interview (Chaudron, 2003). Classroom observation as a data collection technique was used additionally in order to gain realistic insights into teaching conditions, pedagogical processes and task types teachers use in this school (Nikolov, 1999).

The observations were conducted in an unstructured way, which is a typical approach in naturalistic qualitative inquiry. Descriptive field notes were written concentrating on the setting, events and activities, and behaviour of participants. Five classes of the teacher of English and three of the teacher of Russian were observed. The teacher of German first postponed the date of observation, then refused her content to observe her classes.

## Analysis of Interview Data

All interviews were transcribed and analysed through analytic induction and constant comparative methods (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). The continuous comparison of the participants' responses with each other was made. The overall analysis concentrated on the references teachers made to their roles and responsibilities in the classroom. In the interview, there was no specific question about the actual role of the teacher of foreign languages. Answers to different questions included information about the different types

of roles, especially when talking about the types of disadvantage of the children, their teaching style, the evaluation system they use, the results they reach, the classroom dynamics or even their own professional development.

Each quotation was then assigned to a category. The categories were shaped in order to give justice to the complexity of the data collected and make an overview of the teachers' roles possible. Metaphors were used to label these categories. Metaphors can help construct or reconstruct images of these categories and make sense of what happens in educational endeavours (Oxford et al., 1998). Through the cyclical process of data analysis, the following categories emerged: teacher as *motivator*, teacher as *entertainer*, teacher as *facilitator*, teacher as *repeater*, teacher as *nurturer*, teacher as *controller*, teacher as *cooperator*, teacher as *assessor*, teacher as *expert*, teacher as *organiser*, and teacher as *martyr*.

## Findings

In the following section, the results of the qualitative data analysis are presented. The narratives were translated from Hungarian and were selected to represent the observed phenomena.

### Teacher as Motivator

It was the first role mentioned by all the three teachers. Since children do not come to school with favourable attitudes and motivations, teachers' responsibilities are much higher here than in more prestigious educational contexts. When talking about children's weaknesses, they identified socio-psychological features at the outset. They include dysfunctional family background, lack of motivation, different socialisation patterns, among which the most significant is the parents' unfavourable influence on their children's attitudes:

My biggest problem is that learning is composed of three components: teacher – child - parent. And here the parent is absolutely missing. So these young children are totally left alone. [Teacher 1]

Later she further emphasised the motivating role of the teacher in the learning process:

I really would like to grip them so much. They won't do it only for my sake. If they don't like me, then they won't do it anyway. He will simply lie down on the bench and won't do anything. [Teacher 1]

The teacher of Russian underlined that they learned only in the school, never at home. Homework seemed to be the least successful task type.

And the family background is the most hindering impediment, because they never do any homework at all. We must work hard here, they must acquire everything here, whether they like it or not. There's no getting away from it. [Teacher 2]

The interviews revealed that the dominant form of homework was writing, copying or grammar exercises. As explained above, these children often have literacy problems, which could be the reason why this kind of homework was rarely accomplished and had a fairly demotivating effect.

The teacher of German complained about how family problems influence everyday work:

It is very important what they bring along from home. Whether they have the slightest intention of doing anything. I have to speak to them

in such a way that they become interested in the lesson. You have to start from here. [Teacher 3]

Motivation is even more important in the case of disadvantaged children because of certain personality characteristics, they are said to be more affectional and clinging to the teacher:

Then they are very glad, they can be very grateful. Even more grateful than those children who do not even notice these little things for which he has put in significant effort. And now they know it. [Teacher 2]

Coming to think of it, if I meet former students, they really tend to greet more often than perhaps others, with whom I had won a national competition for example. He doesn't recognise me. [Teacher 3]

Individual students who come back later and have succeeded, who remember and are grateful, are particularly valued. These successful cases are the most important rewards of teaching.

### Teacher as Entertainer

The role of the teacher as entertainer comes from his/her role as a motivator. With this approach, the teacher utilizes a variety of acting techniques, forms of expression, and imagination to involve students in the learning process (Oxford et al., 1998). Acting techniques such as body movements, non-verbal forms of communication, role playing and interesting material that the children do not want to put down are employed as catalysts for learning. Imaginativeness involves calling into play all of the senses when conveying knowledge. The use body language and facial expressions help understanding, the teachers does not necessarily translate every expression.

This role of the language teacher was identified by only one of the teachers. The response to the question in what ways her teaching style differs when teaching disadvantaged children clearly expresses this role:

I think you are rather an actress. ... I venture to say that I smile more often. Their motivational level is more difficult to keep high, and you don't expect it from children of normal learning needs. [Teacher 1]

Tudor (1993) uses the metaphor 'teacher as a magician'. Teacher 1 used really creative and 'enchanted' techniques. In one of the observed lessons, she took the children on an imaginary trip to London. They had to close their eyes and she sprinkled magic powder (i.e. confetti) on their heads. Needless to say, the children were fascinated.

### Teacher as Facilitator

This approach puts an emphasis on an inquiry environment, where the teacher's role is seen as a facilitator in the finding of answers. In an ideal inquiry environment, students raise and then answer their own questions with the aid of a teacher. This approach is brought to bear on people's inquisitive nature.

The observed classes proved that teachers were aware of how classroom activities could contribute to the development and maintenance of children's motivation and attention. As these children cannot bear monotony, teachers use a huge variety of tasks. The favourite activities identified by the teachers and noted during the classroom observations included visual tasks (tasks with pictures, drawing), manipulative tasks (matching and arranging pictures

or other language elements), kinetic tasks (“we even do gymnastics, they know its vocabulary” [Teacher 3]), role-plays and dialogues, learning rhymes and songs. As course books are not flexible enough to satisfy these needs, teachers use a lot of supplementary materials created by themselves or taken from other books. This is the most frequent way of how they try to accommodate children’s individual learning needs. During all the observed classes, the course book was hardly opened, only photocopied pages from monolingual supplementary materials, as well as language games and communicative exercises created by the teacher were used.

### Teacher as Repeater

Two teachers identified frequent repetition as an important characteristic of their teaching disadvantaged children:

With these children, we repeat a lot, because we can’t progress if they don’t know a certain part of the material. It also happened that we were using one book for one and a half year. If they don’t know the letters, then I go on in vain. [Teacher 2]

All I can say is that we do more revisions. ... We start every lesson with revisions. It is not accidental that repetition is the mother of learning. Everything becomes fixed. [Teacher 3]

This technique may contradict the above mentioned low level of monotony and may be seen as a less motivating task type. Its major advantage is that repetition helps memorisation and automatising of common language patterns and language chunks. Teacher 2 stressed that repetitions provide a safe environment for learners to experiment with producing the language. This may help build confidence particularly among learners who are not risk-takers.

Repetition as a language learning activity is a frequently used technique, especially with young children. One of the teachers managed to develop a system of repetition exercises in certain phases of the lesson which helped the children to use language confidently. This system was familiar for the children, they knew why the teacher used this technique, and they seemed to enjoy repeating the phrases. It might also help to decrease the use of mother tongue in the foreign language classroom.

### Teacher as Nurturer

Interestingly, no reference was made to the role of the teacher as nurturer in the teacher interviews. The classroom observations revealed a feature of teachers which they had not been aware of: their caring attitude was conspicuous. They often behaved as a nurturer, as a carer, in several cases as surrogate mother. This characteristic is probably due to the fact that several children come from dysfunctional families. The mothers of these children are often very young and not really mature. The observed actions which refer to this function include distributing paper tissues at the beginning of the lesson, sharpening pencils, inquiring about breakfast and paying attention to their eating sandwiches in the break, giving advice on healthy food and drink (“Don’t drink Cola, please! You know, it is very unhealthy. Go to the buffet and get your free milk.”). During the breaks, children were in very close physical contact with the teacher, they kept hugging and kissing her.

Considerable evidence from the research shows that teaching disadvantaged children involves significant emotional understanding and

emotional labour as well. All the three teachers' relations with the children are considerably emotional in nature. Indeed, they all spoke of these relationships in terms of love:

You have to love them, otherwise it doesn't work. If I go into the classroom, that I hate them, that one of them is so dirty, the others are that kind of..., then it doesn't work. [Teacher 2]

The teacher should love them. And be patient with them. The most essential thing is that they see I love them, I give them, and then they want it, too. Isn't that so? We are human beings. It only matters what we radiate. Our wavelengths must meet somewhere [Teacher 3]

You must love them very much. This is the most important thing. [Teacher 1]

Good teachers are emotional beings who connect their work with creativity and challenge.

### Teacher as Controller / Disciplinarian

Teachers of disadvantaged children often complain about discipline problems. Nagy (2002) reports on serious conflicts with Roma students in higher primary classes. Disciplinary problems and inappropriate behaviour were high on the list of difficulties in connection with students in Szekszárdi (2001); and references were also made to disagreements among classmates and a lack of solidarity.

Interestingly, teachers of this school gave accounts of totally different practices. None of the teachers talked about discipline problems and the observed classes attested it. They identified two reasons for this. On the one hand, it is very important to establish and keep behaviour rules and classroom standards. In addition, the reputation for being strict and fair can help to control their power in the classroom:

In my opinion, first of all a teacher has to keep discipline. If there is no silence, no listening, you can't do anything. So the first thing is the air of determination that children must work here. [Teacher 2]

During the observed classes, teachers were reluctant to empower students to take responsibility for fully engaging in the learning process. The role of the teacher as delegator was not significant in these classes.

The role of the teacher as controller is based on the power differential between teacher and learners. This dominant-subordinate relationship was not overemphasised, teachers treated children as equal partners:

If I consider the child as a partner, and I am very consistent, he will do what I want. [Teacher 1]

The direct contact with the class is very important. If they accept the teacher, as I feel they accept me, then it's half the battle. [Teacher 2]

### Teacher as Cooperator

The teacher's role also includes the role of a coordinator in the process of teaching. An ability to cooperate with parents is one of the measures of a good teacher. Babusik (2001) states that involving parents in learning and the school program increases children's motivation to a great extent. Good contact with parents is extremely important with disadvantaged children:

I have good contact with parents and children. You know, in a village, you don't only talk about problems in family visits, but in the street, in

the shop, everywhere. ... The child is frank with me, I know when the child is tired, when he hasn't slept, when the father has beaten the mother, because I know his family circumstances more or less.  
[Teacher 1]

It is essential that teachers be aware of the specific needs of each child. The initial job for the teacher is to investigate each child's family circumstances and school history.

In this school, a constructive professional community of teachers seems to work. Teachers are prepared to cooperate with colleagues seeking or providing professional assistance. Teachers share their concerns with each other in the staffroom or lunchroom.

We have got very close contact with other teachers teaching in this class. We live in a continuous network of contacts. We give feedback all the time. [Teacher 3]

Cooperation with other teachers may result in the development of teaching expertise. Interaction with more competent and knowledgeable colleagues yield higher levels of achievement.

One teacher expressed the importance of good contact with an expert of children with special learning needs. Teachers stated they had received no preparation to teach disadvantaged children in the teacher training college, nor have they participated in such trainings later. The need of knowing more techniques, task types and teaching methods seems to be essential:

I can only accommodate to the special needs of children so that I get certain task types from the colleague who teaches children with special learning needs. I can make similar task sheets in English. She trains me. Not all tasks work with these children. [Teacher 1]

A vague reference to the role of the teacher as a doctor appears in this response. The teacher recognizes symptoms (here: learning difficulties) and prescribes appropriate cures in the form of suitable tasks.

### Teacher as Assessor

The idea of the teacher as assessor focuses on classroom assessment strategies. Teachers are the persons who are in the best position to judge the development of students' progress and they are considered the primary assessors. Teachers have to face the difficult task of assessing individual differences in a disadvantaged class. The most striking differences between the teachers were found in connection with assessment. Teachers have their own evaluation techniques. Individual development is the decisive factor in the case of the English teacher:

For me the starting point is the individual development... I grade their attitude to foreign language learning. [Teacher 3]

Assessment in language teaching should be based on the observation of the quality of the whole learning process. That is the reason why children are assessed only at the end of each topic. She also uses language learning portfolios to motivate the children: a collection of their best work is created in a folder. She regards evaluation as an important tool of motivation:

I usually give them good grades, in order to make them feel a real sense of achievement. I hardly ever give grade one or two. ... I prefer worded assessment to grades because it includes much more details.  
[Teacher 3]

Praising children's oral responses were frequently used during the class in order to increase their self-confidence.

Her colleague has a totally different approach to evaluation. She compares disadvantaged children to 'normal' students, while individual development is disregarded:

For what I could give grade five would probably not be worth a five in another class. That is why there is no grade five in this class. There is only one grade four, the best student. [Teacher 2]

In her view, this does not have a negative impact on children's motivation, they accept and understand her system of assessment.

### Teacher as Expert

The teacher's knowledge of the subject matter and regular preparation for the lessons were also considered to be important:

It's impossible to go to these children without being prepared. You can't do that you enter the classroom and say open your book ... somewhere. [Teacher 1]

However, these abilities are not considered to be nearly as important as the possession of appropriate personal traits and good relationship:

First of all, they need a good man, a human being, not a good teacher. They don't long for a good teacher of a particular subject, but they want to learn from a person who loves them very much. And is willing to accept them as they are. [Teacher 1]

The answer suggests that the role of the teacher in a multiethnic class is to accept and develop each child as a unique individual. It is surprising to some extent that none of the teachers mentioned the importance of knowing the culture, the traditions or language of the Roma ethnicity although the majority of the children are of Roma origin. According to Lázár (2001), knowing and integrating these cultural characteristics into the learning process may be the key to success.

### Teacher as Organizer / Planner

Language teachers usually organize the classroom activities on the basis of what is thought to promote language learning in their beliefs. The way they organize the lessons will have an effect on the several important factors, including language input, interaction, learner speech and discipline.

The teachers as an organizer should involve a wide range of activities in the language teaching process. The teacher is responsible for everything including selecting correct tools and materials, teaching flexible learning strategies, creating the appropriate circumstances, building a cooperative and creative classroom atmosphere. The responsibility of the children's first language teacher is crucial from the point of view of forming the right learning strategies:

I am responsible for forming a child's foreign language learning strategies. Right from the beginning we discuss how to learn, how to control themselves. We do trial learnings in order to know how to learn. We must do it because it is a totally new kind of learning [Teacher 1].

The teachers as organizer is also responsible for creating efficient language learning groups because group characteristics and group processes

considerably contribute to any success or failure (Dörnyei and Malderez, 1997). Groups can serve as an instrument of support and maintenance. One of the teachers talked about a cooperative and friendly classroom atmosphere:

They don't laugh at each other like in a class of better abilities. If someone makes a mistake, laughter bursts immediately there. And here, he doesn't laugh because he thinks he wouldn't know it either [Teacher 2].

It is generally recognized that individual learners have different learning styles, strategies and preferences in a mixed-ability class. Group work makes it possible for the teacher to consider individual needs and to devote more time to the students' oral production. Teachers state to be devoted to using group, pair and individual work and classroom observations confirmed it. One of the teachers complained about the extra burden group work causes:

They are usually divided into groups, into groups of four, but for my part it means a huge amount of extra work, to create different tasks, to monitor them. But they can only be involved in learning in this way. [Teacher 3]

The teacher as an organizer also implies the metaphor of the teacher as a lesson plan tactician. Although teachers have a wide range of professional experience to sequence and pace their lessons, to review or press on, to assign homework or a project, lesson planning seems to be very important.

You must plan everything very precisely. Step by step, everything, this is the only way you can get good results. [Teacher 3]

### Teacher as Martyr

Linked with the idea of being responsible for everything is the concept that teachers are involved in making sacrifices. Teachers feel they used to be more respected members of the community, this status has been devalued by the growing materialism of the society which places more emphasis on money than on education. Especially teaching disadvantaged children is in some schools not a respected and prestigious activity, and sometimes labelled as 'punishment' (Kemény, 1996).

The role of the teacher as martyr was not explicitly mentioned in the interviews, only implicit and indirect clues refer to it. None of the teachers identified her interest, curiosity or professional commitment as the reason for teaching disadvantaged children. The responses all related to their strong family ties in the settlement:

When I got married, my husband lived here. I started working in this school. I wouldn't like to change school because the teaching staff is great, I have got good colleagues. [Teacher 1]

To tell the truth, I had attended this school, and then I got married here, our house is also here ... here in the next street. I have never ever thought of not coming back here. [Teacher 2]

The third teacher (the teacher of German) was more pessimistic about her future possibilities: "I have nowhere to go. That's all." [Teacher 2] This cynical attitude is inexplicable as teachers of English and German are in demand in Hungary, they usually have more options in terms of where to teach.

## Conclusion

Although the identified role of the teacher is to teach foreign language skills, the teacher's role implies a wide range of other responsibilities. By using metaphors and visual images, a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the teacher, and the relationships between the teacher and the children is possible. Looking at educational problems and conflicts in the light of the role of the teacher might give ideas about possible ways to proceed.

The pedagogical implications of this case study may be included in teacher training. The results of this research suggest that more details of the teacher's roles should be highlighted during teacher education, with special emphasis on the emotional need of the children. Understanding the characteristics of disadvantaged children and becoming familiar with efficient teaching techniques can help beginner or even experienced teachers develop expertise in teaching this group of children.

The present research focused on a single case in order to collect extensive data in one school. Its major weakness follows from this; the results are definitely not generalizable and transferable to other situations, however, I believe that the findings do offer significant insight into the difficulties of teachers of disadvantaged children.

## References

- BABUSIK, F. (2001): Az iskolai hatékonyság kulcstényezői a roma fiatalok oktatásában. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 7-8, 150-170.
- BAILEY, L.B. (2006): Examining gifted students who are economically at-risk to determine factors that influence their early reading success. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 33, 307-31.
- CHAUDRON, C. (2003): Data collection in SLA Research. In C. J. Doughty & M. H. Long (Eds.), *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. pp. 762-828.
- DÖRNYEI, Z. & MALDEREZ, A. (1997): Group dynamics and foreign language teaching. *System* 25/1:65-81.
- DUFVA, M. & VAURAS, M. (2002): Promoting at-risk pupils' foreign language literacy learning. In L. Verhoeven, C. Erlbro, & P. Reitsma (Eds.), *Precursors of functional literacy*. Dordrecht: Kluwer. pp. 317-337.
- G. FEKETE, É. & HARGITAI, J. & JÁSZ, K. & SZARVÁK, T. & SZOBOSZLAI, Zs. (2006): Idealistic Vision or Reality? Life-long Learning Among the Romany Ethnic Groups. *Discussion Papers*, 53, Pécs: Centre for Regional Studies of Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
- HAVAS, G. & KEMÉNY I. & LISKÓ I. (2002): *Cigány gyerekek az általános iskolában*. Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó.
- HODGE, M. (1998): Teaching foreign language to at-risk learners: A challenge for the new millennium. *Inquiry* 2(1), 68-78.
- KEMÉNY, I. (1996): A romák és az iskola. *Educatio*, 71-83.
- KERTESI, G. & KÉZDI, G. (2005): Általános iskolai szegregáció, az általános iskolai szegregálódás folyamata Magyarországon és az iskolai teljesítménykülönbségek. *Közgazdasági Szemle*, 52/5. 462-479.
- LÁZÁR, P. (2001): Új utak a pedagógus-továbbképzésben. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 2, 56-69.
- MAYKUT, P. & MOREHOUSE, R. (1994): *Beginning Qualitative Research*. London: The Falmer Press.
- NAGY, M. (2002): A cigány tanulókkal kapcsolatos pedagógiai problémák a pedagógusképzésben és a fiatal pedagógusok munkájában. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 11, 40-58.

- NIKOLOV, M. (1999): Classroom observation project. In: Nikolov, M. & Fekete, H. & Major, É.: *English language education in Hungary. A baseline study*. Budapest: The British Council Hungary. pp. 221-245.
- OXFORD, R. L. & TOMLINSON, S. & BARCELS, A. & HARRINGTON, C. & LAVINE, R. & SALEH, A. & LONGHINI, A. (1998): Clashing metaphors about classroom teachers: towards a systematic typology for the language teaching field. *System* 26/1: 3-50.
- ROJEWSKI, J. W. (1994): Predicting Career Maturity Attitudes in Rural Economically Disadvantaged Youth. *Journal of career development*, 21, 49-61.
- SZEKSZÁRDI, J. (2001): *Nevelési kézikönyv nem csak osztályfőnököknek*. Budapest: OKI Kiadó.
- TÁNCZOS J. (2006): A kognitív folyamatok zavarainak hatása az idegen nyelv tanulására. *Iskolakultúra*, 11, 3-11.
- TUDOR, I. (1993): Teacher roles in the learner-centred classroom. *ELT Journal*, 47: 22-31.
- TURCSÁN, G. (1998): Esélytelen egyenlőség. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 5, 35-44.