

## The Dobbantó (Springboard) Programme, Hungary

The legal basis of launching the *Dobbantó Programme* - and implementing it under the leadership of the Public Foundation for the Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities (FSZK) - was the 2007 amendment of the Public Education Act. The programme began in 2008 with 15 participating schools – 5 from the capital city and 10 from other regions – selected from applicants across Hungary. The participating vocational schools implement the Dobbantó Programme in one or more groups of 12 to 16 students who complete a “preparatory ninth year of education”. The students joining the Dobbantó groups are 15-to-24-year-old young people who have already dropped out of education and training or are about to leave the system, and do not have any secondary or vocational qualification. The Programme offers them an additional year of education to understand and overcome their earlier failures at school, in learning or in their personal lives, and to find the best way to move on, i.e. to return to the school system or to enter vocational training or the world of work.

*The Dobbantó Programme began in January 2008 and is due to end in November 2011.* It has two main strands of activities:

- a) Developing teaching and learning materials for the additional year of education made possible by the law. The purpose of these materials is to support the development and reintegration of students based on their individual needs, in other words to create new, complex (innovative) learning environments that can help to change the views the participating students have about school as a result of their earlier school failures. These ILEs are different from the traditional learning environments in terms of
  - the physical learning environment;
  - the organisation of learning;
  - the learning content;
  - the instruction methods;
  - the pedagogical approach and practice (pedagogical paradigm).
  
- b) Providing training and support to the teachers working with the students and the heads of their schools. Here, the objective is to help the replacement of the so-called traditional focus on the teaching of subjects by approaches and practices that focus on the individual progress of students, and to enable teachers to securely navigate in the new complex learning environments that reflect the pedagogical paradigm of the Dobbantó Programme.

In the preparation phase, which lasted from January to October 2008, a team of invited experts developed the conceptual framework and outlined the content of the Programme according to the professional instructions of FSZK. Calls for applications were published to recruit professionals to support implementation (educoaches to work with the heads of the schools and mentors to support teachers and the implementation of the required changes at the schools), and the training of the successful applicants began. The participating schools were selected in an application procedure. The period between November 2008 and August 2009 focused on preparation, which involved the development of a modular curriculum, the provision of additional training and ongoing professional support to the professionals supporting implementation at the school level, the preparation of the participating schools, and the selection of independent external organisations for monitoring and evaluating the Programme.

The Dobbantó Programme was piloted in the 2009/2010 school year. At that time the teacher teams have completed part of the preparatory training and were ready to pilot the Programme – the

modular curriculum and personalised development at individual pace – with the first Dobbantó groups in the newly created learning environments. Many teachers documented their experiences in this phase, and these experiences were used to revise the modules and the other resource materials. These revisions were also informed by the evidences from monitoring and evaluation. Naturally, throughout this period, the teachers and the heads of the schools could rely on ongoing professional support rooted in practice, which has not changed ever since. In the 2010/2011 school year, the participants could already build on the good practices derived from the pilot, the revised modules and resource materials, and on an accredited Dobbantó framework curriculum. As another new feature, a third independent organisation has been engaged to follow up the success of the students who completed the first school year of the Programme. As the data collected in the first school year suggest that the results of the Programme are good and may be worth sharing, we are now presenting these results in various forums and looking for opportunities to develop Dobbantó into a programme that is suitable for wider dissemination and application.

A more complex description – within the Dobbantó conceptual framework – of the two essential components of the Programme mentioned before changing the learning environment in its complexity and providing support for teachers and school leaders to securely navigate in the ILE:

a) *Complex changes in the learning environment*

The Programme is based on changing in a complex and fundamental way the broadly understood learning environment, including

- the physical learning environment,
- the organisation of learning,
- the learning content,
- the instruction methods, and
- the pedagogical approach and practice (pedagogical paradigm),

which played a role in the earlier school failures of the students and shaped their views of school, learning and themselves.

*The physical learning environment* does not resemble anything that might be associated with the image of a traditional school. The Dobbantó students find themselves in a truly pleasant, aesthetic and motivating setting where every condition is given for relaxation, leisure activities, socialising and more importantly for different ways of acquiring new information and exploiting formal and informal learning opportunities. A typical Dobbantó classroom has an adjacent tea kitchen, an inviting relaxation corner for having a chat with others, a range of sports equipment and educational toys and games, at least three computers with Internet access, learning software, and a resource library.

Small groups are a key feature of the *organisation of learning*. A Dobbantó group may not have more than 16 members, who work with 4 or 5 Dobbantó teachers. As learning is not organised around subjects, teachers may spend more time with the students over a week, which allows them to really get to know the students and also helps the evolution of trust and bonds between the teachers and the students. Wherever possible, two teachers work simultaneously with the class in 40% of the total teaching time. In the schools, the teacher team is assisted by other professionals, such as a school psychologist, a SEN teacher, a special teacher, teaching assistants, the school's teacher responsible for child protection, a teacher specialised in social pedagogy, school-based social workers, etc., depending on the local conditions. Where necessary, these partners also include youth workers. A growing number of employers play an increasingly important role in helping to introduce students to the various job categories. The structure of a school day is also different from the usual: each day begins with a period of whole class orientation, which is followed by longer periods of learning and a so-called "free period", which can be used for relaxation, sports, socialising, eating together, etc. Weeks

are also organised in an innovative way, because students spend one day of each week outside the school. This day is typically used for workplace visits, but there are also many outdoor programmes and learning opportunities.

Essentially, the *learning content* focuses on three main areas: 1. developing communication, social and learning competences needed for continuing formal learning or entering vocational education and training; 2. developing core employment competences and career building competences needed for managing future life; and 3. supporting the personal development and growth of each individual student in order to improve the students' self-image, self-awareness and self-confidence, which is the most important area. 5200 pages of learning materials have been developed to support instruction in a more conventional meaning. Owing to their modular structure, these materials offer a rich resource for teachers to adapt instruction to the students' individual needs. While helping to meet the requirements of the National Core Curriculum, the content of the modules developed for learning communication, social and contemporary studies, English and German as a foreign language, mathematics and science is practical in nature and relates to real-life situations. The "Bridge to the world of work" curriculum, which has been developed for the development of core employment competences and career building competences, is unique in Hungary. Its eight modules building upon one another intend to direct students toward more realistic career choices by helping them to learn directly and indirectly about the various job categories.

As regards *instruction methods*, the Programme gives preference to the approaches of the so-called alternative pedagogies, i.e. it encourages the application of the appropriate variations of cooperative learning and project-based learning, as well as the various forms of individual learning. Formative assessment plays a key role in the Dobbantó, as it strengthens reflective attitudes and practices among students and teachers alike.

The Dobbantó teachers must follow a student-centred *pedagogical approach*. In other words, teachers focus on the individual students and on individual progress. To this end, personal development plans are made with the involvement of students and, where possible, the parents. The PDPs lay down the personal objectives, define the actions to be taken to achieve those objectives, and provide a basis for reflecting on and assessing the achievements at three-month intervals. As it is considered important to help students learn how to take responsibility for their actions (and progress), contracts and agreements may be made for shorter periods, as necessary. Each student has a so-called partner among the teachers, who sits down with the student to talk every week. These conversations are often more informal than formal. The teachers work in a team, help one another, and discuss problems at their weekly team meetings. This makes their work significantly easier, because they are not left alone in managing the problems of their students, which are often difficult to handle and solve.

#### *b) Professional support to changing/improving schools*

Pedagogies ensuring attention and personalised care to each individual student are increasingly proposed as a solution for reducing early school leaving. On the other hand, it is hardly mentioned that teachers may find it very difficult to meet this demand without help. This is because introducing personalised approaches to schools would require teachers to abandon deeply established routines, which is a task that typically takes a very long time and necessitates professional intervention.

Since the age of 6 (i.e. the time of entry into school or the very start of preparing for the teaching profession), most teachers and school leaders have had most experience with frontal teaching. Their own primary and secondary school teachers must have treated all students more or less the same and not let their authority in the classroom questioned. Such personal experiences – gained in 11,000 or more lessons – inevitably lead to the development of a *deeply rooted mental model*, which is only strengthened by a higher education system that tends to treat students uniformly and measures

performance by testing. This means that personal experiences accumulated, reinforced and internalised over 16 or 17 years need to be deleted and overwritten for a teacher to be able to securely navigate in the complex learning environment demanded by the Dobbantó paradigm, or to use any other approach that focuses on supporting the progress of individual students instead of covering the material scheduled for the day.

Changing such deeply embedded views and practices is a long interactive process. In constructivist terms, it requires a *conceptual change*. Becoming an informed and experienced user of a student-centred approach takes more than merely switching to new teaching materials and learning content, or extending the teaching repertoire. This explains why curriculum reforms and new learning resources introduced in isolation and initial or in-service teacher training programmes disconnected from everyday classroom experiences have never been able to deliver the expected results. *Only gradual steps and reflective pedagogical thinking and practice, based on constantly looking ahead and back at the same time, can lead to the evolution of a firmly based practice of consciously selecting the content, tools and methods that are appropriate to a particular individual or situation.* The Dobbantó Programme has embarked on a journey of this latter type. After two and a half years of continuous interaction with the participating teachers and school leaders, half or perhaps two-thirds of the journey has been completed. At the current stage, where the participants already know where they need to improve, the following solutions are applied:

- Every teacher team receives support from a so-called *mentor*, who receive training and supervision under the Programme to be able to help implementing changes at the school. The mentor visits the school every month to facilitate reflective thinking and change processes, which includes offering possible solutions to the team, should it get stuck. Through his or her presence and activities, the mentor is to provide a role model of student-centred and supportive teacher behaviour. One of the mentor's important task is to help the participating teachers become a team.
- As an important means of promoting and improving reflective thinking in teachers (and school leaders), the Programme offers financial rewards to the participants who submit observations and comments on their *own practice and experiences*. Such products can relate to any teaching activity and have already been written about work in the classroom, the experiences with the modules, the work done with the students (case studies), the results of professional development, training or experimenting with certain methods, and the school leaders' experiences. The formative assessment of teacher performance is the responsibility of the heads of the schools, but the Programme Management provided them with formative assessment models in the first two semesters. (Teachers' products can be uploaded continuously to <http://www.fszk.hu/moodle/>. Access is free to all after registration.)
- School leaders are supported in improving their leadership practice through reflection by so-called *educoaches*, i.e. professionals who have been trained to adapt their wide experience in business coaching to the special conditions of the education sector.
- *School leaders* can also benefit from two-day training sessions organised annually on any topic that may be considered useful in the light of the progress of the Programme, and participate in meetings to discuss operative issues 2 or 3 times a year, or as needed.
- The Programme maintains good relationships with the *local authorities* of the schools, provides them regular information on the results of the participating schools, and organises

meetings for school leaders and administrators to discuss achievements and the opportunities for exploiting or taking forward those achievements within the community.

- “*Regional*” exchanges are organised twice a year, in three locations each time. These meetings are not attended by all school teams and leaders (but every team can participate in one meeting at least in each semester). Each regional meeting is hosted by a different school. The objective is to provide opportunities for a direct exchange of experiences and for learning from one other (teachers like these events so much that many of them applied for and participated in all the three regional exchanges organised last year).
- When the Programme began, 8 key aspects of development (buoys) were defined for the participating schools / Dobbantó teams to help them moving toward student-centred practices that can be used effectively to prevent early school leaving. This was considered necessary, because the fifteen schools that had joined the Programme represented different stages of development and different levels of quality in terms of applying personalised teaching and learning and the willingness/capacity to change. As the buoys were seen as a useful aid to understand the essence of Dobbantó, the schools were asked to diagnose their current situation and set objectives in these eight key areas. On the basis of these, each school/team prepared an improvement plan and an action plan for a semester, whose implementation was evaluated at the end of the semester, and a new action plan was adopted (with the necessary amendments) for the next semester. The formative assessment of these reports and action plans was carried out by the Programme Management.
- The Programme Management monitors all processes and acts or intervenes, as appropriate, upon detecting good practices or issues in the following:
  - memos written by mentors and educoaches about their visits to schools;
  - records of case discussions by mentors or educoaches;
  - reports made by the schools;
  - regional meetings;
  - training sessions organised for school leaders;
  - meetings organised for school leaders;
  - documents written by the teachers;
  - feedback received from the monitor or external evaluator of the Programme.

In conclusion, our (evidence based) experiences suggest that at least 3 years – more realistically 5 years – are needed to achieve an authentic and fundamental change in deeply embedded pedagogical views. From the perspective of cooperation with students, the objective is to develop student-centred, personalised approaches and practices. In the case of teachers/school leaders, this is to be achieved by applying constructivist tools and methods.

### Dobbantó Buoy

Buoy	Description	Support provided by the Dobbantó Programme
<b>Individual learning path</b>	The school should provide a real opportunity for adaptation to individual development needs by ensuring personalised development paths. Personalisation may be extended to objectives, the competences to be developed, the learning content, the depth and width of learning, the ways of organising teaching and learning, the learning time, the methods of assessment, and the learning environment as a whole.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• individual development plan</li> <li>• learning contract</li> <li>• learning materials</li> <li>• resource materials: <i>Student Support Booklet 2</i> <i>Modules</i> <i>Competence cards</i> <i>"But How?" series</i></li> </ul>
<b>Teamwork</b>	Teamwork is an essential feature of the Programme. The objective is to achieve broad based cooperation with the involvement of as many people as possible, regular consultations, and concerted work by the team members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mentoring</li> <li>• professional background</li> <li>• resource material: <i>Student Support Booklet 1</i></li> </ul>
<b>Career building</b>	The Bridge component is meant to help transition from school to the world of work. It offers a diverse range of activities for developing and reinforcing a positive self-image in students by building upon their individual strengths. It focuses on the development of competences for employability, improving self-awareness, and introducing jobs and occupations. Another important feature is that the students are provided with regular opportunities (on a weekly basis) for visiting workplaces / gaining work experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mentoring</li> <li>• building connections to the world of work</li> <li>• resource materials: <i>Job shadowing</i> <i>Networking – But How?</i> <i>Modules</i></li> </ul>
<b>Student support</b>	Complex – psychological, social, learning – support for students, involving efforts to understand the students' personal life situations and ideas about the future, and the provision of professional and special assistance for changing these, as appropriate. Student support means personalised development and services that are adapted to the students' individual abilities and needs, and contribute to reducing or removing the obstacles to achieving their objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mentor</li> <li>• building connections to the local support system</li> <li>• training sessions of regional meetings</li> <li>• resource materials: <i>Student Support Booklets 1 to 4</i> <i>Newsletters</i> <i>Teachers' works</i></li> </ul>
<b>Cooperation between schools and coaches and mentors</b>	Every school works with a coach, who supports the head, and a mentor, who supports the teachers on an ongoing basis. The schools are required to develop arrangements that will ensure successful collaboration with these external participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mentoring for teachers</li> <li>• coaching for school leaders</li> <li>• support for mentors</li> <li>• support for coaches</li> </ul>
<b>Whole school involvement</b>	The isolation of the Dobbantó class and the teachers working with the Dobbantó students is not desirable. Consequently, the schools are required to work out the ways of spreading the new mindset and methods among the whole teaching staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work of Dobbantó team</li> <li>• coaching</li> <li>• resource materials: <i>Case studies by school leaders</i> <i>Exchanges for school leaders and regional meetings</i></li> </ul>
<b>Finding and retaining earlier drop-outs</b>	Schools are required to develop procedures for finding, attracting and retaining earlier drop-outs living in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teachers (mentoring)</li> <li>• school leaders (coaching)</li> <li>• resource material: <i>Recruiting students</i></li> </ul>
<b>School improvement programme</b>	Each school is required to draft a school improvement plan whose implementation is considered feasible within the period of the Programme in the light of the diagnosis of its current situation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• defined sets of criteria</li> <li>• resource materials: <i>Model improvement plans</i></li> </ul>

### The schools participating in the Dobbantó Programme:

- Addetur Foundation’s General and Vocational Secondary School, **Budapest**
- Budai-Városkapu Nursery School, Primary School, Vocational School, Special Vocational School and Elementary Art School, **Pécs**
- Éltes Mátyás Primary School, Special Vocational School, Children’s Home, Dormitory and Educational Support Service, **Nyírbátor**
- “Esély Education Centre” Primary School, Special Vocational School, Integrated Educational Support Service, Educational Consultant, and Learning Ability Assessment and Rehabilitation Board, **Békéscsaba**
- Esély Kövessi Erzsébet Vocational and General Secondary School, **Budapest**
- Göllesz Viktor Primary School, Special Vocational School and Dormitory, **Iregszemcse**
- Harruckern János Public Education Institution, Gyula, **Szabadkígyós** Member Institution
- Kecskemét Technical Vocational School, Special Vocational School and Dormitory, **Kecskemét**
- Kiskunfélegyháza Secondary School, Vocational School, Special Vocational School And Dormitory, Kossuth Lajos Member Institution, **Kiskunfélegyháza**
- Martin János Vocational Training School, **Miskolc**
- Öveges József Teacher Training Secondary School and Vocational School, **Budapest**
- Szász Márton Primary School, Vocational School, Special Vocational School and Integrated Special Education Institution, **Tapolca-Diszel**
- Szolnoki Service Sector Vocational Secondary School and Vocational School, **Szolnok**
- Than Károly General and Vocational Secondary School and Vocational School, **Budapest**
- Bercsényi Miklós Food Industry Vocational Training Centre, Dormitory and Teacher Training School of the Central Hungary Agricultural Vocational Training Centre of the Ministry of Rural Development, **Budapest**

