



The Challenges of Educational Change in a Learning Organization in Slovakia

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Abstract

While changes in education are often analyzed through abstract sociological frameworks, this study bridges the gap between theory and practice by examining the internal organizational transformation of a selected Slovak elementary school. Based on concepts of transformational leadership and school culture, the study goes beyond the framework of top-down policy implementation and analyses how a school's internal mechanisms can actively combat institutional inertia.

Using a qualitative case study approach, we examine practical interventions implemented by the school administration and teaching staff to bridge the gap with the local marginalized community. These measures included direct personal visits by teachers to the excluded community, local awards for student attendance, and school community service projects aimed at engaging parents. Initial results indicate a significant empirical impact: over a two-year period, school attendance among children from the marginalized community increased by more than 20%. Furthermore, these interventions have successfully stimulated parental involvement and fostered unprecedented sociocultural ties between families from the marginalized community and families from the majority population. At the same time, a unique phenomenon has emerged—based on the initiative of the school's management and governing body, a proposal for the division of new school districts was introduced and implemented by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic as part of the new school reform starting from September 2026, placing the school examined in this research in an unquestionably unique situation within the Slovak educational landscape.

The study thus also has a political-urban dimension in the context of the new municipal school policy. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the sustainable transformation of education depends not only on well-thought-out internal changes within the educational institution, but also on local cultural reorganization and proactive, community-driven synergy.

Keywords: *educational change, school culture, education policy transfer, school leadership*

1. Introduction

In contemporary pedagogical and sociological theory, the concept of educational change represents a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the mere implementation of new curricular goals or organizational adjustments. Educational change is, at its core, an ontological process that affects the deep structures of institutions and the professional identity of their actors. As Fullan (2007) notes, the essence of change lies in the process of seeking and attributing new meaning to educational activity. However, this process is inevitably confronted with institutional inertia and social mechanisms, which Bourdieu (1990) defines through the concept of "habitus." In the school environment, habitus functions as a set of deeply rooted dispositions that predetermine the behaviour of actors and often act as an unconscious but powerful filter against any external innovative efforts.

Conceptualizing educational change requires an understanding of the historical and professional context of teaching (March, 1994). In his classic analysis, Lortie (1975) points out that educators are shaped by long-term socialization within the traditional school system, which creates a conservative framework resistant to change. This professional isolation is reinforced by the specific organizational structure of the school, which Mintzberg (1979, 1989) characterizes as a professional school bureaucracy. In such an environment, power is dispersed among autonomous professionals, leading to a phenomenon that Weick (1976) defined as "loose coupling." A critical understanding of educational change must therefore consider the micropolitical reality of schools. Blase (1991) and Ball (2015) emphasize that the school is not a monolithic unit, but an arena of constant struggles for influence, resources, and recognition. In this sense, educational change is not merely an administrative act but the result of complex negotiation and strategic action. If change does not reflect these power relations, it falls into a cyclical repetition that Cuban (1990) critically describes as "reforming over and over again" (p.1). The successful implementation of educational changes and the subsequent transformation of the school therefore



requires not only a change in structures within the educational institution, but above all the building of the school's capacity as a learning community (Stoll, 1999), where school leadership does not act in a directive manner, but as a catalyst for collective development (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999; Ullah and Muslim, 2025).

1.1 Traditional and Contemporary Paradigms of Educational Change

The traditional paradigm of educational change, based on the work of Lewin (1947), was grounded in a linear model of social equilibrium. This approach assumed that the educational system is a stable entity that can be transformed into a new, fixed state through controlled intervention. In this context, reforms were viewed as “top-down” approaches to educational change (March, 1994). On the other hand, however, as Cuban (1990) points out, such an approach often led to a cyclical repetition of reforms initiated at the ministerial level, which, while recurring, affect only superficial structures and rarely penetrate the core of pedagogical interaction in the classroom. Cuban (1990) refers to this phenomenon as persistent stability within a network of proclaimed changes.

The current paradigm of educational change reflects the complexity of school systems through the concept of “loosely coupled systems,” introduced into organizational theory by Weick (1976). In this understanding, the school is not a monolith; what happens at the level of administration or ministerial policy often has only a weak connection to what occurs in classrooms. This perspective explains why formal changes in education are often implemented only pro forma. In response, theories emphasize the importance of school culture and its changes in terms of the dynamics of the educational environment and institutions. Hargreaves (1995) and Stoll (1998) argue that real change must address the deep-seated beliefs and norms that constitute a school's cultural identity.

Shifting the focus from external management of change to the internal transformation of organizational culture, Connolly, James, and Beales (2011) bring a critical perspective to the discussion, distinguishing between culture as a management tool (functionalist view) and culture as a deep social reality (an interpretive view). Their case study suggests that changing school culture is not a linear process, but a complex interaction between the organization's formal requirements and the informal subcultures present in school life. This perspective corresponds with the work of Schein (2010), who notes that ignoring invisible cultural patterns and subcultures leads to the failure of implementing educational change or reform in the school environment.

A significant shift in the current paradigm is the emphasis on the concept of the learning organization and school leadership, through which Schein (2010) notes that organizational culture and school leadership are two sides of the same coin; leaders must be able to diagnose cultural barriers and transform them in a targeted manner. Senge (2006) expands this perspective to include the disciplines of systems thinking and collective learning. From his perspective, educational change should not be dictated but rather emerge as the result of a shared vision and the continuous development of all stakeholders within the educational institution, based on collective learning and regular reflection. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) and Fullan (2007), who point out that effective change in an educational institution depends on leaders' ability to delegate power and support the professional autonomy of those experiencing educational change.

2. School As an Organization in the Process of Educational Change

In current scholarly discourse in the fields of educational sciences and sociology, a paradigmatic shift is occurring in the view of the school institution. The school is no longer perceived as a rigid bureaucratic institution, but as a complex, adaptive, and internally differentiated organizational system (Trinidad, 2024). Educational change in the school environment thus does not represent merely an isolated event or the mechanical implementation of a reform but becomes an intrinsic feature of the institutional existence within a given educational institution under the conditions of an evolving reality (Connolly, 2011; Fullan, 2007). The success of this transformation depends on a deep understanding of the synergy between formal structures, the physical environment, and the layers of the naturally evolving culture of the educational institution in question.

2.1 School Culture in the Process of Educational Change and the Risk of “Pseudo-Change”

Kruse and Louis (2009) define school culture as an essential prerequisite for the sustainable improvement of an educational institution. They develop the idea of the school as a “Professional



Learning Community,” where a key element is the “deprivatization” of pedagogical practice. This refers to the transition from learning in isolation to an open, collaborative culture. Part of “deprivatization” involves the mutual sharing of experiences, planning and evaluating the educational process, and teachers observing each other’s classes, thereby making practice a public and shared endeavour aimed at the collective growth of teachers not only as individuals but also as an educational organization (Aldridge and McLure, 2024). However, this process required a profound shift in the perception of the teacher’s identity - from the teacher as an “autonomous ruler of the classroom” to the teacher as a “member of a collaborative team.” According to Kruse and Louis (2009), the shift from individual to organizational responsibility is a fundamental hallmark of successful school culture change. In this context, Fullan (2007) notes that cultural transformation is the most difficult phase of educational change because it affects teachers’ professional self-confidence. It requires a high degree of mutual trust, which the organization needs to build over the long term, as well as an effective feedback mechanism (Fullan, 2007; Bellei, 2016).

This social perspective is complemented by Engeström’s (2001) concept of expansive learning, which emphasizes the need to overcome systemic contradictions within work activities, thereby making learning a tool for the active transformation of the school itself as a workplace. The school as a learning organization thus integrates teachers’ individual mastery with social learning, and this approach must also be reflected at the micro-level of the classroom (Sarason, 1990), where Watkins (2005) proposes building classrooms as autonomous learning communities.

A key mechanism for overcoming these barriers and activating the potential of a learning organization is a specific type of leadership that goes beyond the administrative level of implementing educational changes. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999, 2005) identify transformational leadership as an essential prerequisite for changing organizational conditions and increasing the engagement of faculty members. Transformational leaders not only articulate a shared vision but also provide teachers with intellectual stimulation and individual support, thereby building the school’s capacity for sustainable improvement. The overall success of the school as a learning organization is thus contingent on the synergy between a clear structural concept, the cultivation of a collaborative culture, and the ability of leaders to navigate the school through the complex micro-politics of power, conflict, and cooperation, as elaborated in detail by Blase (1991).

Connolly, James, and Beales (2011) also highlight the risks associated with the absence of this synergy and the closely related superficial change in school culture. They distinguish between culture as a variable (something an organization “has”) and culture as an essence (something an organization “is”). Their research revealed that a so-called “pseudoculture,” in which teachers outwardly declared their agreement with the new vision, but in the privacy of their staff rooms continued to practice old routines and maintained a cynical and dismissive attitude toward the administration and any efforts at improvement on their part.

In this context, Connolly, James, and Beales (2011) caution against viewing school culture as a variable that can be simply programmed and implemented in a simplistic manner. It is primarily the result of systematic listening and an understanding of deeply rooted traditions, values, and beliefs, some of which are common to all schools, while others are unique and closely tied to the history and location of a specific school (Krusa and Louisa, 2009; Hargreaves, 1995).

3. Changing School Culture in the Process of Educational Change and School Stakeholders

School culture in the process of educational changes and the subsequent transformation of the school is not merely a passive target of change, but an active force that determines whether a new educational policy will be assimilated, marginalized, or completely rejected (Liddicoat, Scarino, and Kohler, 2018). To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, it is essential to employ the concept of “recultivation,” which Fullan (2007) defines as the process of challenging and subsequently transforming the fundamental beliefs and habits that shape educators’ everyday reality. Unlike “restructuring,” which changes only the formal arrangements (schedule, roles, school regulations), recultivation addresses what Schein (2010) refers to as “basic tacit assumptions.” If educational change requires, for example, a transition to inclusion, it may encounter a deeply rooted cultural assumption that students with different needs should be educated separately. Profound change in school culture therefore occurs only when this mental model is replaced by a new, shared belief in the value of diversity (March, 1996; Schein, 2010).

3.1 The Dialectic of Resistance and Cognitive Dissonance in School Culture Change



Profound change in school culture is inevitably linked to the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance and the emotional labour of the actors involved (Kruse and Louis, 2009). Ball (2015), within his micropolitical theory, emphasizes that cultural change is not a consensual process but the result of negotiation and resistance. Teachers' resistance to cultural change is often not a sign of laziness but a defence of professional integrity in an environment that is increasingly dominated by the logic of performativity. If school culture is transformed by external pressure to constantly measure results in any given area (the globalization pressure analysed by Rizvi and Lingard, 2009), a rift emerges between the teacher's humanistic mission and the technocratic demands of the school's governing body. This process can lead to the erosion of the original culture and its replacement by a culture of "reporting," where authentic relationships are replaced by auditable outputs (Stoll, 1998; Deal and Peterson, 2002).

For cultural change to become permanent, it must be institutionalized into daily routines and rituals. According to the concept of professional learning communities (Kruse & Louis, 2009), the key mechanism for deep change is the de-privatization of practice. In traditional school culture, teaching is a private act behind closed doors. Profound transformation requires changing this cultural code into a culture of "radical transparency." This process is also supported by Engeström's (2001) theory of expansive learning, in which an organization overcomes internal contradictions by creating a new, broader object of its activity.

Woolner et al. (2018) also argue that the physical layout of a school is "petrified" culture. If a school professes a culture of collaboration and innovation, yet its spaces continue to reproduce a hierarchical and isolated arrangement, cultural change is materially blocked. A profound transformation of school culture therefore requires a physical reconfiguration that physically prevents a return to old patterns of behaviour and compels educational actors to adopt new, innovative forms of interaction.

Changing school culture through educational reforms is thus not a linear adaptation, but a profound ontological struggle over the institution's identity. It requires a shift from isolation to networking (Trinidad, 2024), from administrative management to transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005), and at the same time the courage of stakeholders to navigate a period of uncertainty until new patterns of behaviour become established as the new cultural norm (Bellei, 2016).

3.2 School Stakeholders and Their Influence on the Implementation of Educational Changes in the Context of School Culture

The relationship between an organization's structure and its culture is realized through the interactions of key stakeholders, namely teachers, school administrators, and school founders (Schein, 2010). Each of these groups enters the process of educational change with its own interests and degree of power, thereby actively shaping the final form of the organizational culture (Takayama, 2013; Stolp, 1994). School leadership plays the role of a key mediator in this process. As documented by Leithwood and Jantzi (2005), the application of transformational leadership principles is an essential prerequisite for the successful restructuring of cultural patterns. Transformational leaders, unlike transactional managers, do not operate solely through rewards and sanctions, but actively stimulate teachers' intellectual development, formulate a compelling shared vision, and provide individualized support (Ullah and Muslim, 2025). Analysing the leadership of school, Stolp (1994) states that the principal's role does not lie in micromanagement, but in the ability to interpret external changes so that they align with the institution's internal values.

According to Stoll (1998), teachers are the immediate implementers and, at the same time, the strongest guardians of school culture. In his classic sociological study, Lortie (1975) highlighted the conservative nature of the teaching profession, which is shaped by years of socialization in isolated classrooms. Ball (2015) examines teachers' attitudes toward educational changes in this context in detail through the lens of school micropolitics. He debunks the myth of the school as a harmonious community and reveals it as an arena of power struggles, where teachers resist reforms that threaten their professional autonomy, working hours, or established methodological practices (Ball, 2015). School culture thus bears the hallmarks of a defence against external demands for change. On the other hand, Biesta (2015) emphasizes that without teachers' full professional ownership of change, any reform is merely an administrative act. Teachers need to perceive change as meaningful for their own educational goals; otherwise, what Hargreaves (1994) refers to as "forced collegiality" occurs—that is, a state in which teachers mechanically fulfil requirements for teamwork and innovation solely to satisfy external oversight.

Schein (2010) identifies school founders and the broader political apparatus as the third key actor exerting macro-structural pressure on school culture. School funders are the agents of both global and national education policies, which permeate schools through mechanisms such as funding,



standardized testing, and inspection activities (Leitwood and Jantzi, 2005). Ball (2012) and Rizvi and Lingard (2009), in their theories on global education policy and neoliberal discourse, note that external actors often impose pressure on schools to prioritize performance and the measurability of outcomes. These demands directly challenge the traditional humanistic culture of schools and force them to transform into data-driven organizations. The school's governing body thus shapes the parameters within which culture can develop, but the actual translation of these macro-level requirements into daily practice is always subject to the institution's local specifics (Portnoi, 2016; Venger, Fontdevila, and Zancajo, 2016).

4. Methodology

This research is based on the classic organizational case study design (Berg 1968), which, however, relies on the researcher's active participation within the organization as a member experiencing a change in organizational culture, as noted by Connolly et al. (2011), with the addition of the methodological framework of the organizational sociology of education (Trinidad, 2024). This involves supplementing the structure of the school environment analysis through a three-level methodological framework for the study of schools, which allows for viewing the organization from multiple complementary perspectives.

4.1 Methodological Framework and Theoretical Basis of the Research Paper's Case Study

In the social sciences, a case study represents a specific research design that focuses on an in-depth examination of a bounded system within its real-world context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). According to Stak (1994), cited by Connolly et al. (2011), a case study is not merely a methodological choice but, above all, a selection of what is to be examined - that is, the case as an integrated system. The process of constructing and "creating" a case study consists of precisely delimiting the phenomenon in time and space and subsequently collecting complex data through data triangulation.

The methodological design of Connolly et al. (2011) is defined as an instrumental and longitudinal case study that charts an eight-year period of transformation at a secondary school in South Wales. The data collection itself was based primarily on Beales's (2006) doctoral dissertation and includes a wide range of semi-structured interviews with fifteen teachers, seven students, school governors, and school administrators.

According to Trinidad (2024), integrating his three complementary perspectives into the methodological framework allows a deeper analysis of how structural constraints and network dynamics within the school respond to factors in the external environment.

The way in which Connolly et al. (2011) structure the case analysis and create individual research areas departs from the traditional chronological description (Lewin, 1947) and moves toward a multi-perspective analytical framework (Beales, 2006). The individual areas of the case study emerged through a deductive-inductive process in which theoretical concepts of organizational culture were systematically applied to empirical data collected at the school. It operates on several interconnected levels that allow for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of educational change. At the individual level, the research examines individual teachers' perceptions of change and their emotional responses to new leadership practices (Schein, 2010). The group level focuses on the formation of subcultures and tensions between opponents and supporters of change within the teaching staff. The organizational level subsequently captures changes in the school's structure itself and in systems for monitoring student progress, while the societal (literally, environmental) level considers the influence of broader political pressures and national standards on the internal life of the institution.

The theoretical foundation of the study and its connection to previous research demonstrate a deep grounding in the discipline of organizational theory. A key starting point for the case study by Connolly et al. (2011) was the work of Smircichová (1983), who distinguishes between culture as a variable and culture as a metaphor. Connolly et al. (2011) also draw on the classic models of Schein (2010), whose levels of culture help clarify shifts in the mindset of the teaching staff. The research by Connolly et al. (2011) is also influenced by Alvesson's (1993, 2002) studies on the ambiguity of culture and directly builds on the theme of school improvement represented by Fullan (2007) and Stoll (1998). Weick's (1976) work on schools as loosely coupled systems also contributes to an understanding of transformation processes.

Connolly et al. (2011)'s contribution, compared to these predecessors, lies in the integration of diverse perspectives into a single coherent whole, which demonstrates that successful school change requires simultaneous engagement with reality, interpretation, and power relations within the community. We



therefore view the methodological approach of the case study by Connolly et al. (2011), supplemented by the organizational sociology of education (Trinidad, 2024), as suitable for the methodological grounding of the research in our dissertation. At the same time, it provides us with a suitable framework for potentially incorporating areas that will be characteristic of the educational environment and context of the selected school.

4.2 Case Study – Elementary School Description and Research Findings

This case study focuses on the transformation of the Alma Private Elementary School (hereinafter referred to as SZŠ Alma), which was established through the process of separating the original public elementary school located at 1 Jilemnického Street in Zvolen, Slovakia. From a regional perspective, it was a catchment-area institution in the Sekier district, established by the City of Zvolen. The school had long faced the stigma of being a segregated institution with a high proportion of students from marginalized Roma communities (MRC), which led to a dramatic decline in enrollment and the local government's consideration of its possible closure due to financial unsustainability.

The formal transfer to the CEEV Živica as the new school sponsor in 2024 was the result of a strategic agreement with the city, intended to save the school from closure. With this step, the new founding body took over not only the infrastructure but also the accumulated financial debts and the school's complex emotional history. Given the starting point, the sponsor decided to implement changes using a "small steps" methodology - gradually and slowly, with an emphasis on continuously fine-tuning what proves effective in practice.

The preparatory phase in the 2023/2024 school year required a more profound intervention in the school's teaching staff, which can be described as a "purge of the teaching staff." During the change process, more than 50% of the original teaching staff left, as their mindset was incompatible with the school's new paradigm and vision. Despite the arrival of new teachers, research observations identified a risk of so-called "teacher isolation." A tendency toward professional isolation and resistance to activities beyond basic duties emerged among some of the new staff. According to the data collected so far, this phenomenon represents one of the main managerial challenges in building a proactive organizational culture, which SZŠ Alma continues to address even after September 2024.

In September 2024, at the time of the official launch of operations under the new identity and the commencement of the research study, SZŠ Alma was in a state of formative dynamics. The school successfully managed its first intake of freshmen, with more than double the number of freshmen enrolling in the first year compared to previous years (34 freshmen in 2024 versus 13 freshmen in 2023). The data collected so far show that active engagement with the community is a fundamental prerequisite for changing the school environment. SZŠ Alma is building a network of relationships with parents and partners in the city of Zvolen through events such as the Education Festival and parent clubs, which are also open to parents of future students. This outward openness helps SZŠ Alma not only transform the school's culture from within but also successfully integrate the school into the city's local ecosystem.

Through informal conversations and our time at the organization, we have so far identified, via structured observation, the key characteristic of implementing educational changes: working with teachers and the school's vision, which is shifting from a traditional structural perspective to an open, collaborative model of cooperation and openness between the teaching staff and school management. Teachers at the school are thus changing over time along with the school's evolving dynamics. Together, they are working on a vision that unites the entire educational organization—so that every child at this school can fulfil their own potential.

4.3 Research Analysis

This case study focuses on the profound transformation of the Alma Private Elementary School (SZŠ) in Zvolen, which was established through the process of separating the original public elementary school on Jilemnického Street in the Sekier district. The implementation of changes was based on a "small steps" methodology, characterized by gradual and empirically verified fine-tuning of processes in practice. As part of the management reconfiguration, two key participatory governance bodies were established: the Board of Directors and the School Council, which ensured expert oversight and transparency of processes.

A quantitative analysis of the data collected to date demonstrates the gradual formative impact of the measures implemented. In September 2024, the school saw a significant increase in interest in enrolment, with 34 first-year students entering the first grade—more than double the 13 first-year students in the previous year, 2023. This success validates the effectiveness of the marketing strategy



and the promotion of the institution's new vision to the public. The most significant empirical shift occurred in school attendance among students from the marginalized neighbourhood of Pustý hrad. Over the two-year period under review, there was an average increase in attendance among these students of more than 20%. This shift was achieved through a combination of proactive micro-political interventions, which included regular in-person field visits by teachers directly in the community, localized recognition of students for attendance carried out in their natural environment, and community volunteer projects. These interventions demonstrably stimulated the participation of families from the local marginalized community and led to a 15.5% increase in parental involvement in the school's informal activities, thereby laying the groundwork for breaking down sociocultural barriers between the minority and majority populations.

However, a qualitative analysis of internal networks revealed significant staffing challenges. The preparatory phase in the 2023/2024 school year required a radical overhaul of the teaching staff, during which more than 50% of the original employees left, as their mindset was incompatible with the new inclusive paradigm. Despite the recruitment of new teachers, the phenomenon of professional isolation (*teacher isolation*) was identified through structured observation and informal interviews. A tendency toward isolated professional practice and a certain resistance to activities extending beyond the scope of basic teaching duties emerged among some of the new staff. Building a proactive organizational culture and eliminating this isolating behaviour thus represent the main managerial challenge that school leadership faces even in the implementation phase of educational changes after September 2024.

5. Discussion

The results achieved in the transformation of SZŠ Alma confirm the theoretical postulate that sustainable educational change is not a mechanical product of top-down bureaucratic directives, but the result of a complex institutional reconfiguration in which the organization transforms into a learning community gradually capable of self-reflection (Fullan, 2007; Liddicoat, Scarino, & Kohler, 2018). Research findings to date demonstrate a shift from a traditional structural perspective to an open, collaborative model of cooperation between the teaching staff and school management.

The turnover of teaching staff (over 50%) illustrates deep institutional inertia and the limits of organizational stability. As Schein (2010) notes, organizational culture rests on hidden assumptions that individuals internalize. The departure of half the faculty confirms that school transformation often requires the destruction of the original institutional habitus that hindered innovation. On the other hand, the identified phenomenon of professional isolation (*teacher isolation*) among newly hired teachers reveals the limits of adaptation to change. Teachers facing the emotional baggage associated with the school's historical stigma and high demands on community work tend to retreat into the safety of their classrooms. This mechanism correlates with March's (1994) warnings against formal administrative adaptation that does not touch deeper professional identities. Overcoming this insularity requires a transition toward the thorough de-privatization of pedagogical work, where reflection becomes the collective property of the organization.

Empirical success, in the form of a more than 20% increase in attendance among children from the Pustý hrad community and a 15.5% rise in parental engagement, attests to the importance of connecting the school with its local ecosystem. This approach stands in direct contrast to the neoliberal discourse of performativity (Ball, 2012, 2015), which reduces school success to quantifiable performance testing. Instead, SZŠ Alma focused on cultural reengineering and building social capital directly in the field. As Trinidad (2024), Woolner et al. (2018), and Bellei (2016) emphasize in their synthesis, a successful school turnaround requires the simultaneous synergy of three dimensions: structural coherence, material support, and cultural depth. If measures remained merely on paper, the institution would likely revert to its original state after the initiators' departure, confirming the importance of embedding changes in organizational memory and structures (Biesta, 2015).

The significant contribution of the study in the context of education policy is the demonstration of a causal trajectory from local micro-success to macro-legislative change. While theoretical models of policy transfer (Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2014) often criticize "contextual blindness" in the adoption of global reforms, the case of SZŠ Alma documents the opposite, endogenous process. The school administration's initiative and its practical desegregation outcomes sparked a nationwide professional discussion on equal opportunities in education. This pressure led to an unprecedented step, in which the Slovak Ministry of Education, at the initiative of the Alma School Board, incorporated a new adjustment of school districts directly into the national reform, effective September 1, 2026. This legislative amendment serves as a systemic measure against the segregation of Roma children and students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds throughout Slovakia. The case study thus provides



empirical evidence that local transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005), supported by effective micro-practice, can reconfigure not only the internal culture of an institution but also national education policy.

6. Conclusion

A deeper look into the “turnaround trajectory” reveals that successful schools in the context of educational reforms in socially disadvantaged environments did not succeed thanks to a single miracle method, but rather due to the coherence of a system comprising multiple measures. Bellei et al. (2016) describe a school that radically transformed its results by implementing a system of intensive feedback based on “coaching techniques and questions” (Instructional Coaching). In this model, each teacher received brief but highly specific weekly feedback from an experienced colleague based on direct observation of teaching in their classroom. The data showed that effective educational change must be supported by specific micro-practices that are integrated into the daily routine of teachers’ lives at school. The transformation of a school as an organization thus represents a dialectical process between stability and change. As research by Trinidad (2024), Woolner et al. (2018), and Bellei (2016), successful school transformation requires simultaneous attention to three dimensions: structural coherence, material support, and cultural depth. Without an understanding of the interconnections between physical space, informal networks (relationships), and professional identities in the broader context beyond the school, attempts at educational change in the context of school transformation remain merely at the level of formal administrative change—without a real impact on the quality and sustainability of the educational process (March, 1994; Schein, 2010).

True school change is therefore a process of comprehensive institutional reconfiguration in which the organization becomes a learning community capable of mutual reflection, feedback, and self-transformation at the level of human and teaching capital (Liddicoat, Scarino, & Kohler, 2018; Fullan, 2007).

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