

I. Theme and background to the research

There has been an increasing interest in the problem of juvenile delinquency in the public opinion as well as among researchers. Lawyers (e.g. *András Vaskuti, Klára Kerezsi*), sociologists (e.g. *Mária Herczog* and her colleagues, the research group led by *Mercédesz Mészáros, Ágnes Solt*), special education teachers, psychopedagogists (*Anna Volentics, Anna B. Aczél, Attila Szarka*) are trying to find out how the ratio of crimes committed by juvenile delinquents is changing and what are the causes of this phenomenon. Among the disciplines dealing with this issue, pedagogy is not much present – which I found puzzling and intriguing – in spite of the fact that the scenes of socialization (family, school, contemporary relationships) have a decisive role in the process of criminalization. I find it important to research this subject from a pedagogical perspective not only because of the causes of criminalization, but also because pedagogical aspects are essential in the measures taken by the childcare and/or juridical systems (e.g. patron supervision or reformatory), and, on the other hand, teachers also play a role in the individual's way of life after the childcare and/or criminal procedures.

The relevance of the topic can be justified from the perspective of educational history research. Since the 1990s there has been an increasing demand for the research of childhood, which mainly bore results in the field of educational history. Researchers of the history of childhood – which has become a major trend within educational history research – include not only historians (*Katalin Péter*) and educational historians (*Katalin Kéri, Attila Nóbik, Béla Pukánszky, Éva Szabolcs*), but also an ethnographer (*Ildikó Hegedűs*) and a psychologist (*Zsuzsanna Vajda*). In Hungary childhood history research is mainly based on the analysis of pedagogical sources (works of philosophers, textbooks, educational periodicals). As far as their topics are concerned, they have concentrated on the examination of children's way of living and their life at school as well as the analysis of the image of children as presented in educational periodicals. However, it can be considered to be a shortcoming that these works did not really deal with those children who were the "clients" of child protection, neither with their position in the society. The first part of my dissertation aims to fill this hiatus with a brief historical outline which focuses on the development of the image of juvenile delinquents and the changes of the reformatory as an institution.

Apart from educational historical research, further childhood research related to other areas of pedagogy is scarce¹, as Erzsébet Golnhofer and Éva Szabolcs wrote: "There has been little analytical research into the special characteristics of childhood, and social structural analyses mainly deal with adolescence, there are hardly any surveys about the microworld of childhood..."² Looking at the available literature about the topic, it can be seen that there have been relatively few surveys about reformatories. One notable example is the activity of Sándor Illyés Research Laboratory of Gusztáv Bárczi College of Special Education (today ELTE Gusztáv Bárczi Faculty of Special Education), which took part in the Social Adaptation Disorders project between 1981 and 1989. This institute co-ordinated the research of deviant behaviour in childhood and adolescence, among others the work of *Péter Popper, Jenő Ranschburg* and *Judit Csere*, but they also carried out their own research. As for reformatories, *Anna B. Aczél* and *Ágnes Darvas* carried out a survey about the resocialisation activities of closed and semi-closed institutions. In the 1990s, as a result of *Anna Volentics*'s work, we could learn more about the children living in reformatories. Her results drew the attention to the importance of changing the attitude in child and youth protection, as "it is essential to be able to accept that childhood – in spite of being an integral part of an individual's life – is a phase of his development which is different from all the other stages. This is the phase when he or she has the right to make mistakes and stagger, and not only when learning how to walk or during the development of movement."³

The aim of my research is to give a brief overview of the history of the issue, then provide an overall picture about the childhood of juvenile delinquents and their ideas about childhood. I aimed to get acquainted with a group which is not very well-known for general pedagogy, while I used a not very widely-used methodology – pedagogical ethnography. Furthermore, I researched an educational institution which is often pictured as a "mystical" and often "frightening" place for outsiders. My aim is to analyse the pedagogical work in the reformatory and the characteristics of its inmates from a pedagogical perspective. With my research I would like to contribute to Hungarian childhood research, and, by employing the method of pedagogical ethnography, I wish to point out the importance of the researcher's active participation while exploring the internal life of an institution, to show how ethnographic research can be integrated into the pedagogical work of

¹ Kívételt képez ez alól az ELTE Oktatásméleti Tanszék által végzett kutatás, melynek során 7 és 17 év közötti gyermekekkel készítettek strukturált kvalitatív interjút. Ezek elemzése során árnyalt képet kaptak a kutatók 100 gyermek tanulóképéről, az iskolai pályafutásuk jellegzetességeiről.

² Golnhofer Erzsébet – Szabolcs Éva (2005): *A gyermekkor kutatásának új útjai. Gyermekkor: nézőpont, narratívák*. Eötvös József Könyvkiadó, Budapest. 98. o.

³ Volentics Anna (1996): *Gyermekvédelem és reszocializáció*. Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest. 260. o.

the researched institute and how a research method can help the pedagogical process in the life of a closed institution.

II. Research questions

In the historical section I aimed to carry out a historical analysis of issues which are examined by researchers even today:

- How did the age-level of criminal liability change through time and what reasoning was used?***
- What types of crimes were committed by juveniles?
- What happened to the juveniles after committing the crime?
- Why did they commit the crime?
- What was the opinion of the researchers about the depraved/profligated juveniles?
- How did reformatories change in the 19th and 20th centuries?

When examining the literature about the current situation, I included the questions discussed in the historical section, thus providing adequate foundation to the empirical research, which focused on the following:

- What factors contribute to the criminalization of a juvenile?
- What kind of child image do the participants of the research have?
- How is school represented in the life of reformatory inmates?
- What are the characteristics of education in reformatories?
- What kind of the child image do reformatory teachers' have about juvenile delinquents?

III. Summary of findings

1. *A historical analysis of juvenile delinquency*

During my historical research I mainly used primary – and unexplored – sources from the archives of the Aszód Reformatory and the documents of the Ministry of Justice from the Hungarian National Archives.

My research showed that the *age-limit of criminal liability* was a recurring issue. The demand for the regulation of legal actions against juveniles first arose at the end of the 18th century. The draft criminal code of 1792 came up with the idea that criminal procedure should not be initiated against children under 7 years of age and it was also planned to introduce differentiated punishment depending on the age. The principles of this draft were incorporated into the Hungarian jurisdiction with the introduction of the first Criminal Code (Code Csemegi) as Law No. 5 of 1878. This act ordered the establishment of reformatories for juvenile delinquents, though it did not say anything about the organization, equipment and operation of the institutions. But it provided that no public proceeding can be started against children under 12 years of age. The 1908 amendment to the Criminal Code kept the lower age-limit of criminal liability, saying “those who have not reached their twelfth years of age at the time when the crime or offence was committed cannot be prosecuted or placed under criminal procedure”⁴, but the higher age-limit was determined at 18 years of age. These changes are probably related to the interest in children which began in the late 19th century. With the appearance of the children-study* movement, besides legal aspects, psychological and pedagogical aspects also appeared when dealing with juvenile delinquents. Until the middle of the 20th century the viewpoint of the criminal justice concerning juveniles was the following: between the ages of 12 and 18, juveniles must be treated differently from adults, and thus besides penal enforcement, pedagogical aspects also appeared. In the legal practice there was a discernible intention to “correct” and to educate, which is one of the reasons for the appearance of reformatories and the increase in the number of inmates. After World War II there was no significant change in the judicial practice, until 1961 the age-limit was 12 and 18 years of age, though they were continuously planning to raise the age-limit. This only occurred with the enactment of Law No. 5 of 1961, in which Article 20 provided that criminal procedure cannot be started against those who have not reached 14 years of age. Law No. 4 of 1978 about the Criminal Code did not change the provisions of the 1961 law concerning age-limits and educational procedures.

Among *the types of crimes committed by juveniles*, crimes against property are the dominant in every discussed period. There are some differences between the eras in what was considered to be a culpable crime. Political crimes are good examples: while in the age of dualism I did not find any such event related to juveniles, after World War II there was a dramatic increase in the number of unauthorized crossing of the frontier and

⁴ Balogh Jenő (1909): *Fiatalkorúak és büntetőjog*. Budapest, 1909. 253. o.

participation in political rebellion. The adverse effects of wars can be easily seen on juvenile delinquency: there was a rise not only in the usual war crimes, but wartime conditions had their impact on the frequency and severity of crimes which are common in peace. In the 1950s new crimes appeared besides crimes against property: vagrancy, and from the late 50s and the 60s unauthorized crossing of the frontier became more frequent. From the late 1970s not only the number of crimes increased, but there were remarkable changes in the way of committing them: since the late 70s there has been a dynamic increase in violent crimes and truculence. There was also a significant rise in the ratio of crimes committed by groups, the members of which were often the same age, but from the early 1990s there has been a growing number of juveniles in groups of adult criminals.

The sources reveal serious difficulties concerning the *criminal procedure*. The authorities, the police, the courts and barristers were often criticized. The most important criticism was that during their work they should put more emphasis on the more humane and pedagogically more professional treatment of juveniles. It is worth noting that they drew attention to a problem which is present even today: when juveniles are detained, there is not enough space and opportunity to keep them separately during detention, though its harmful pedagogical and psychological effects are obvious. As far as the *trial* is concerned it is important to note that as early as 1913, Law No. 7 provided the establishment of juvenile courts, whose tasks included jurisdiction over juvenile delinquents as well as making measures to protect minors who were liable to deprecation (Art. 3.). An interesting debate unfolded about the selection of the judge, who was expected to possess complex knowledge of pedagogy, sociology, genealogy, psychology, psychiatry and special education.

When *exploring the reasons for crimes* it is easy to notice the effect of sociology, which appeared in the early 20th century. This was the time when the view developed which said that the causes of juvenile delinquency included external factors resulting from the deficiencies of the society (e.g. the school), but internal factors (family, genetical determination) must not be ignored either. The first sociographic research (*Elemér Kármán, Lipót Nemes*) drew attention to the disorderly conditions of juvenile delinquents' families. In the 1950s the exploration of causes declined and only revived in the 1960s. In the 1960s and 1970s the main reason was considered to be the deficiencies of the socialization of the family: besides the accumulated disadvantageous situation and deviant subculture, personality disorders and mental deficiencies were also emphasized. *Erika Váradi*⁵ gave a complex unity of these elements in her study about the research of causes of juvenile delinquency in the 1990s.

The different approaches in general pedagogy can be found in *the views about juvenile delinquency* too. Dealing with juvenile delinquents appeared in the age of dualism, but that time it was mainly an action of charity: the opinion about them was merely a kind of pity, and the support was usually given through an association instead of granting it directly. Among professionals it was mainly lawyers and educators who were becoming more and more responsive to the problem of juvenile delinquency. In the early 1900s it could be clearly seen that the opinion about juvenile delinquents changed for the better among teachers and lawyers as a result of the unfolding children-study movement. It was more and more expressly stated that "the deprived or criminal children and juveniles who are placed under legal proceedings are not similar".⁶ In the interwar period it was also often asked whether a juvenile delinquent is an incorrigible criminal or just an invalid victim. This dilemma is shown by the terminology: in professional literature the terms "morally deficient" and "socially abnormal" were used, which indicated that they considered criminality to be a problem of special education, while in everyday life they were treated as young convicts. As for the corrigibility of criminals, the idea of indeterminism, i.e. the impossibility to change the personality, was replaced by the concept of the "fair medium", the changeability and pliability of the character. Until the mid-20th century juvenile delinquents were treated as morally deficient people, which implied that it was a curable disease, and the juvenile delinquent is a sick person, who can be treated and corrected in the reformatories founded from the 1880s. The ideological changes after 1948 made their impact on the image of juvenile delinquents. State socialism – especially in its first period – refused to deal with the problems of criminality. Thus, until the late 1950s dealing with juvenile delinquents did not have a central role in the childcare system. It is clearly shown by the fact that reformatories were placed under the authority of the Office of Workforce Reserves. In the public opinion, inmates living in reformatories were seen as apprentices who had some behavioural problems. Since the 1960s, but especially the 1970s the problem of handling the issue of juvenile delinquency has been more and more visible: the continuous increase in the number of delinquents has caused an alarm, and they have gained more and more attention. The notion of "antisocial personality" has appeared, and looking into its characteristics we can see that the attitude towards juvenile delinquents was of a normative kind. When describing them the focus was on their deviation from the "norm", from the "average", thus a very negative image has developed about juveniles who have committed a crime. Since the 1980s, besides psychology, sociology has also started to deal with the problem. It is shown by

⁵ Váradi Erika (2001): A gyermek- és fiatalkori bűnözés – tendenciák, elméletek, okok. In: Domokos Andrea (szerk.): Kriminológiai Közlemények 59. Magyar Kriminológiai Társaság, Budapest. 55-91. o.

⁶ Balogh Jenő (1910): Gyermekek és fiatalkorúak a bíróság előtt. *A Gyermek*, 6-7. o.

the mainstream research concentrating on the deficiencies of social integration, which describes the juvenile as an important person for the society: it is the interest of the society to integrate him or her, and it is the deficient socialization process which leads to a criminal career. The current image of the juvenile delinquent is also associated with it, being an ambivalent image of innocence and guiltiness. They can be considered to be innocent because it is their immediate and wider environment that predestines them to criminalization, but they cannot be exempted from the consequences of the crime they have committed.

The first *reformatories* were founded in the late 19th century. Their pedagogical function was markedly present from the beginnings: the first sources already pointed out the importance of education. Besides elementary teaching, the strong presence of vocational training is also perceivable. In every examined period one of the primary functions of reformatories was considered to be the training of inmates to work, as it was recognized that work will enable the juveniles to live normally in the society. The pedagogical activities of the institutions were apparently influenced by social changes: a good example of this is the changes in the content of religious and ideological education. Opinions about reformatories have been ambivalent since the 19th century: besides the positive aspects, the efficiency of closed institutions were often questioned. About the juveniles living there two distinct images have developed about the “typical reformatory inmate”: some inmates were described as an “everlasting burden to the society”⁷, and an impenitent criminal who would never integrate into the society, who “possesses a way of thinking deviating towards depravation”⁸ and who has little repentance or remorse. He hardly shows any true repentance, and refuses to become a member of the community. At the same time another image of the juvenile delinquent also developed as a victim of the given times and circumstances, who was hard-working and wants to correct himself, and thus his moral reliability was continuously increasing.

Teachers in the reformatories had to perform a number of tasks: the education of morally and sometimes mentally deficient juveniles was not easy, it demanded special qualifications as well as knowledge of criminal pedagogy and psychology. However, until the second half of the 20th century there was not such specialized training available for them. Even today the required qualification is a primary or secondary school-teacher degree.

The figures show typical difficulties. Staffing was a permanent problem in the reformatory: especially in the mid-20th century extreme shortage and high turnover of staff caused serious problems. It was due to the lack of government subsidies and the very difficult working conditions. The seclusion of the world of reformatories and its isolation within the society was also noticed.

⁷ Egy növendék jellem- és életrajzi füzet, 1946. Aszódi Javítóintézet Irattára. Érdekes, hogy pont ez a növendék érettségizett le a végén, és szerezte meg a technikus végzettséget kikerülését követően a pártfogói jelentés alapján.

⁸ Egy növendék jellem- és életrajzi füzet, 1946. Aszódi Javítóintézet Irattára

2. Pedagogical ethnographical research on juvenile delinquency

From a *research methodology* aspect I undertook to work out a complex research methodological model which – though with a small sample – could help me to get a deeper insight into the issue of juvenile delinquency. For this reason I worked out a complex research model based on the collective biographical research model (KAF) of Stefan Busse, Christiane Ehses and Rainer Zech.⁹ To my knowledge, this research model has not been used in Hungary. Busse, Ehses and Zech worked out this model for a qualitative analysis of biographical texts in the early 1980s. Their principle was that the distance between the researcher and the researched topic should be eliminated, thus the special feature of their approach was that the researched person was seen as the witness of the social situation, i.e. they see themselves as shapers of the social conditions, and on the other hand, due to their characteristics they also form the theoretical framework of the research. My own collective biographical research model was based on this approach, which is collective as it focuses on a certain group, thus a social layer is presented, but it is also biographical as I tried to get acquainted with the group at the level of the individual using different methods (participating observation, qualitative interview, focus group conversation, etc.). My pedagogical ethnographical research is divided into two parts: I explored the world of the reformatory and the issue of juvenile delinquency from the perspective of the inmates and from that of the teachers as well.

I carried out *pedagogical ethnographical field work* to monitor the everyday lives of reformatory inmates using different methods (oral conversation, participant observation, etc.) My aim with this field work was to get a view of the world of the reformatory similarly to those people who are living there either as inmates or teachers. This perspective is often called emic or inmate perspective, which can obviously never be perfect. But the researcher must think in another way too, since at the same time my task was to notice the less obvious, hidden dimensions of the reformatory system.

As part of the pedagogical ethnographical research I carried out *biographical research with 30 reformatory inmates*. With this I did not aim to examine the truthfulness of the stories, but the subjectivity in them, as a life story is an individual's construction about him/herself. This is of particular importance for my research since the individuals whose life-stories I recorded were still in the phase of finding their own identity. During the oral interviews I employed a special type of the qualitative interview, the phenomenological deep interview when building up the structure of my interviews. The phenomenological deep interview was created as a combination of the life-story interview and the thematically focused interview¹⁰, and it consists of three separate interviews. According to Seidman the first interview should concentrate on the focused life-story, thus I asked the interviewees to talk about themselves and their lives. The aim of the second interview was to learn their views about specific topics (family, school, the world of the reformatory, their vision for the future). I adapted the method of not using pre-written questions. At the last interview I asked them how they had felt during the previous interviews and how difficult it had been to talk about these topics. Besides, I also organized focus group conversations, which were really useful for the juveniles to tell their views about certain topics.

I also interviewed teachers (16 persons) who volunteered to take part in a thematically focused interview consisting of the following main parts:

- becoming a reformatory teacher
- the reformatory inmates and the teacher's pedagogical work
- the difficulties in their profession.

During the interviews with the teachers I employed the method of organized metaphor-collection with a simile. I wondered what they compare the reformatory and the inmates to, so I worked with previously defined terms (reformatory, inmate). During the analysis of the metaphors I examined which terms were emphasized and from whose perspective they responded to the question (“What does the institute mean to ourselves and to the inmates?”), and what emotional charge the reply had. A new application of the metaphor-method was the employment of the experiment worked out by Ben-Peretz.

The field-work and the series of participation observations slightly modified the picture which I formulated after analyzing the documents. However, it was obvious to me that with the help of direct contacts I could learn considerably more about the latent processes in the institution. When employing the research methods I consciously tried not to use them just for the research but also to help the juveniles. I consider it a major result of my research that my pedagogical ethnographical research proved to be a supporting and developing process in the life of the Aszód Reformatory.

⁹ Busse, S. – Ehses, Ch. – Zech, R. (2000): *Kollektive-Autobiografie-Forschung (KAF) als subjektwissenschaftliche Methode*. Letöltés ideje: 2007. június 24. <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/2-00/2-00busseetal-d.htm>

¹⁰ Seidman, I. (2002): *Az interjú mint kvalitatív kutatási módszer*. Műszaki Könyvkiadó, Budapest.

3. *Childhood of juvenile delinquents: family, violence, school*

The exploration of the childhood of reformatory inmates was an essential part of my research. The phenomenon of “social deficiency” is easily perceivable, which has two extreme forms. First the visibly endangered child, whose family is characterized by undereducation, cultural handicaps, deviant way of life, constant tension, quarrels, permanent fear, physical and sexual abuse, psychoterror and sadism. On the other hand, children from families with relatively or definitely good financial conditions can also be found here. They suffer from negligence, loneliness, boredom and emotional neglect.

Relationships within the families are also deficient – though at different levels –, which can be explained with inadequate communication or with the fact that the parents – either as a result of their own immaturity or the lack of a proper model – are unable to perform the role of the parent. Concerning *educational styles* we can find the authoritarian, demanding and rule-orientated parent, who regards his/her authority more important than his/her child’s needs. The usual method of disciplining is punishment, and they do not help the children, who are often aggressive. I also encountered permissive and lenient educational style in the case of four juveniles: the parents – just because they loved them – set up very few boundaries, they did not discipline at all, and as a consequence of their permissiveness the children did not develop a sense of responsibility, and they are not aware of the consequences of what they do. According to the participants of the conversation I could identify the neglectful educational style: the parents did not care about their children, they left them alone both physically and emotionally.

The majority of the juveniles who took part in the research are from families with very disadvantageous conditions – from financial and emotional aspects as well – and this affected their views of childhood and family. In the families of my interviewees *harassment* appeared in several – physical, sexual and emotional – forms, and its impact on the personality of the individual is very complex. The atmosphere in the family did not help them to acquire and internalize the social norms since they lacked appropriate models. These juveniles did not and does not have a solid background, thus they can be easily orientated towards the wrong way; they did not have a real childhood, did not enjoy playing with other or going on excursions, and never experienced an atmosphere of trust, love and safety. All this had an apparent influence on the image of family and children. It could be clearly seen how they followed the traditional gender roles that they had seen in their families, and they had a “traditional” view of the place and the role of the child. They saw children as subordinated individuals in the family, who must obey the father.

An important part of the research was the discussion about *violence*. All of the interviewees have experienced aggression as a victim and/or an aggressor. The *violence in the family* made a decisive impact on their childhood: many of them were exposed to serious physical and sexual violence, the psychic consequences of which are apparent even today. During the focus group conversations we discussed what violence meant in their lives and how they could define it. With one exception all of them identified violence with physical aggression, which indicates that they have a very simplified concept of violence. It is well-known that in a closed environment there is a high degree of violence and aggression. It would be naivety to think that this problem does not occur in the lives of reformatories, as it is very difficult for juveniles with different family backgrounds and low adaptability to endure confinement, the rules and the distance from their family, the familiar environment, their friends, partners and perhaps even children. *Violence inside the reformatory* can be the juvenile’s aggression towards himself and towards the outside world, which can manifest itself in many different ways: from shouting and quarrels to fights either with the fellow inmates or the teachers. Sometimes disputes and rows lead to fights. The most frequent cause of the fight is when rude things are said about someone’s mother or he is called an orderly. Another cause of the fight can be the so-called initiation, which is a kind of ritual in every closed institution or community. The juveniles consider it absolutely natural, saying: “*you have to fight everywhere if you want to be accepted*” (Boy No. 17). The teachers should be able to notice the signs of this so that the juveniles would not have the opportunity to assault others.

I also examined their relationship with the school, which revealed that the public education system did not always function appropriately in the case of these juveniles. Their school career was characterized by an “orientation towards failure”. The analysis of the opinions of elementary school-teachers showed the “prototype juvenile delinquent”: naughty, bad, harmful, offensive and aggressive child who is dangerous to the community, who cannot be developed and who does not accept the norms of the community, does not show respect to the teacher and often assaults them. The “outside” teachers admitted that they were not able to handle these children at all.

After getting to the reformatory, the children found themselves in the schooldesk after skipping one, two and often even three years, so their knowledge usually did not reach the level which their school reports indicated. Their motivation to learn is very low, which can be explained with the failures and the experiences they had gained at school. Their attitude to school is clearly shown by the similes they used. The “school as a prison” refers to confinement and the restriction of freedom, where the teacher is the punisher and the child is the punished one. The child can leave this place only after meeting certain requirements. Comparing the school to a

torture-chamber and a mortuary can mean total hopelessness. They probably tried to express the feeling of defencelessness with these similes. The identification with a homeless shelter can refer to the infrastructure of the school as well as the feeling of loneliness and neglect. Only two persons mentioned their plan to get some qualification when talking about their future. In such circumstances the organization and implementation of education in the reformatories is an extremely difficult challenge.

4. *The world of the reformatory*

Reformatories generally do not have a high esteem: those who oppose them – or rather do not understand them – criticize them saying that education in the reformatories has not changed in the last 100 years, and in the spirit of the rights of children there is no need to “lock up” juveniles.¹¹ Though these opinions sound somewhat exaggerated, they are correct in the sense that reformatories must respond somehow to a number of challenges. As a consequence of the changing judicial practice, the number of inmates is decreasing, and *the characteristics of the inmates and their crimes* have also changed. The changes in childhood in general can also be observed about the inmates too. While earlier (until the late 70s) there were hardly any juveniles who had been convicted of violent crimes, today almost three quarters¹² of them come to court because of seriously aggressive crimes: besides robbery committed in groups there is an increase in the number of serious sexual crimes and crimes causing bodily harm, and we can even meet juveniles who had been convicted of crimes against life. The inmates are more and more aggressive, not only verbally, but often physically too.

During the analysis of the pedagogical activity of the reformatory I considered it important to ask the inmates’ opinion about the institution. According to the juveniles’ descriptions a relatively positive picture took shape about the institution. 19 out of 30 interviewees had the opinion that “*I’m lucky, because compared to the hardness of the crime I committed, I’m happy that now I’m at such a ‘loose’ place*” (Boy No. 23). Besides its “looseness” they emphasized its openness – especially those who had spent their detention in a penal enforcement institution –, and many (14) compared it to a boarding school. The distinction made between the prison and the reformatory can be clearly seen: in their view the most important difference was that the reformatory gives them a chance to implement their goals in life, as they can “become more educated and learn a trade”. However, this contradicts to what they said about their future plans.

They criticized many aspects of the life inside the reformatory. They noted the *lack of stimuli*: the inmates’ previous life had been full of events and movements, and now they had found themselves in a completely different environment with fewer stimuli, which was very difficult for them to endure especially in the first months.

The worst thing for the juveniles is that fact that they are away from their families. Though they did not always have a good relationship with them, they are still attached to them. In the first months – even if they can take short leaves – the most important events were the visits of the family members. Besides the missing family and friends they also emphasized the feeling of confinement and uncertainty: “*When I got here, I was afraid of what would happen to me. My brother had talked a lot about the prison, and I expected that the same would happen to me too.*” (Boy No. 22). The general tendency in the juveniles’ behaviour was – according to their accounts – the compensation of uncertainty, a major method of which was to talk about their makes and to test the limits. It is not surprising that offences against the rules of the institution are most frequent after the first few weeks, especially following the first month of admission.

The juveniles appreciate it that they have considerably more opportunities to learn and to study a trade, which can help their integration in the future. Many of them talked about positive relationships with the teachers and about their support to “get back to the normal way”. As a result of the experiences in the reformatory almost all of them stated (23) that after leaving the institution they would never commit crimes again, but they did not outline specific plans for their lives, they would rather rely on fortune and destiny.

¹¹ Idézi Változó javítóintézet – javítóintézeti változások. www.aszod-afi.hu/valtozo_javito.doc Letöltés ideje: 2006. december 10.

¹² Szarka Attila szóbeli közlése.

5. *Sentenced to be educated*

The last part of the dissertation examines the life of the reformatory and the issue of juvenile delinquency from the *teachers' perspective*. After a general description of the teachers (qualification, age) I discussed the unique features of their career socialization.

The interviews revealed three ways of *becoming a reformatory teacher*: besides conscious decision and being “drifted”, there is a unique feature of the Aszód Reformatory: reformatory teacher-dynasties. Though the majority (10) of my interviewees had chosen the teaching profession deliberately, they had not planned to work in such an institution, but as they found themselves here, they undertook the additional work which accompanies this special world. Compared to beginner teachers in the public education system, these employees need more time to gain experience, because, in their view, teacher-training institutions did not prepare them sufficiently for the circumstances they would meet there and for the children they would deal with.

To discover the *hidden self-image* of the reformatory teachers I employed the metaphor-examination worked out by *Ben-Peretz*. Most teachers chose the hen, which refers to caring, and the gardener/sculptor, who suggest transformation. None of the respondents chose two metaphors: the judge and the production line worker. These choices also indicate that reformatory teachers consciously try to distance themselves from the spirit of penal enforcement, and they emphasize the educational and socializational functions as well as the importance of individual treatment.

I considered it necessary to examine the teachers' opinions about their workplace. I asked the respondents to finish the following sentence: “*The reformatory is like ...*”. Based on their content I divided the replies into four groups (these were the source concepts). One group included all the replies which compared the institution to the home or the family (13 replies). Besides the feeling of intimacy, it is inevitable that the sense of *confinement and seclusion* is also attached to it. Reference to the unique, closed world appeared in many replies: they compared the institution to a colony, an island or a closed boarding school. As far as their work was concerned, the teachers emphasized its aspect of *giving aid* (23 replies), as they think that the reformatory is the last resort to a juvenile from the difficulties of the world or perhaps from his own family, or “*a sanatorium where we cure him and help him to learn how to take care of himself*” (K. 37 year-old woman). The respondents found the diversity to be an important characteristic of the reformatory, one of them compared it to a bar “*where many kinds of people turn up*” (S. 32 year-old man), but metaphors of nature also appeared: the institution is a colourful forest with many types of plants, and it is the workers' task to take care of them. It is worth noting that a large number of similes about the inmates were borrowed from the nature.

In connection with the *image of reformatory inmates* the most important issue is the responsibility of the family. All of the interviewed colleagues blamed the families for criminalization. Their opinion about the inmates is well illustrated by the way they finished the sentence “the reformatory inmate is like...”, where I received 38 different replies. The subject concept was the reformatory inmate, and from the responses I could elicit the following source concepts:

- *Getting lost, wildness*: those metaphors are listed here which refer to deviation from the norms, e.g. a tourist lost on an island, a lost young man, a derailed train, a child who has stumbled in the normal way of life.
- *Harm*: for example a psychically wounded juvenile, an exile, a child in an accumulated disadvantageous situation. According to an especially apt reply the reformatory inmate is like “*a stray dog, who needs help, who is starving, full of fleas, but growls at the helping hand, and sometimes even bites it*”. (D. 27 year-old man)
- *The same as any other children*: some respondents thought that the inmates were not different from children in the outside world: 3 of them compared them to boarding school students, while other respondents said that “*they are the same as the others, but everything is a lot more difficult with them*” (Zs. 53 year-old man), so the necessity of differentiation appears here too.
- *Giving aid*: in the responses there was a common element saying that the juvenile delinquent is a person who needs help, assistance and protection.

One of the most important parts of the research is the *exploration of the teachers' problems*. Besides inadequate remuneration a serious problem is the lack of external professional support (supervision, case studies – the institutions cannot arrange these themselves, though it would be essential to prevent from “burn-out”), and the issue of retirement. It was regarded as a general problem where the reformatory teacher belongs to: how he/she can reconcile the tasks required by jurisdiction, i.e. to keep the child and the complex educational tasks, which include teaching as well as the development of the personality. After the political regime change the question of professional autonomy arose too. Those teachers who had worked in the previous system for a longer period often cannot cope with the current, more liberal system. Instead of experiencing it as an opportunity, they are rather uncertain: The pedagogical assessment can cause problems not only when giving feedback about the students' performance, but also when assessing their own work. In both institutions the teachers want assessments, and they need more feedback about the quality of their work. Their assessment by the public

opinion is rather adverse: many colleagues (9) felt that their work was definitely not assessed positively. There are two trends in this respect: some are seen as “oddballs”, and their unfamiliarity, their real or assumed peculiarity led to the fact that they are somewhat isolated from teachers working in other schools. Seven teachers said that they are looked down by the public, who say that probably bad teachers work with such children, as good teachers work in good schools. The examination of the work of reformatory teachers revealed that they are working under considerable psychological pressure: the relationship with the students is a significantly more personal, which brings up several difficulties. According to the interviews there are many problems which teachers in other schools also suffer from: too much pressure, lack more visible pedagogical assessment, adverse public opinion – these occur even more seriously in the world of the reformatory, but some special difficulties can only be found here. The reformatory is a closed world, a secluded island, where not only the inmates are confined but – to a certain extent – the staff too.

6. *The researcher's reflections*

The characteristics of juvenile delinquents basically determined what research methods to employ. In the pre-research phase I had to realize that there was no point in using written questionnaires as they have serious difficulties with understanding and creating texts, therefore I deliberately omitted this method. It is well known that the choice of research method is largely affected by the composition of the research sample. If we look at *Charles S. Peirce's*¹³ conditions which should be met in order to find a common ground between the interviewer and the interviewee, it can be seen that my task was not easy. I had to meet the following requirements. The two parties must:

- know the language used
- know the general characteristics and use of the language
- have similar basic experience
- know their body language and oral language
- have mutual trust.

The question may arise: What can the researcher learn through a qualitative research? Which of his/her competences develop? How can he/she contribute to educational science? The skill which can develop through a qualitative research is that of *responding*. This could be seen at two levels. First I had to see changes in my own way of thinking, and secondly, besides responding to my personal emotions, I had to respond to the research process too: I needed continuous feedback to see whether the method and the approach I chose would be effective and meet the scientific requirements of an empirical research.

In order to ensure *reliability* I kept detailed and accurate records, since qualitative research can be successful and accepted only if it is assisted with a clear structure, the consistent use of methodological principles and accurate and detailed documentation. To achieve reliability I employed – among others – the principle of low-interference descriptors. In order to enhance *validity* I used – among others – the so called triangulation processes. *Denzin*, who coined this term, lists more types of triangulation. In order to achieve triangulation of the data, besides collecting data from the reformatories I also used other official sources and secondary literature. There was a relatively wide range of persons giving information: juveniles and teachers too. During the triangulation of methods I used different data-collecting methods, which I employed within the framework of the collective biographical model. The triangulation of observers/researches was also present in my research: besides myself, *Judith Virág* played a significant role in the research process, she helped arranging the interviews, she interviewed two persons and gave very important help in the observation process.

It was not easy to take on the role of the participating researcher: I was considerably more exposed to the emotional reactions of the juveniles, which sometimes made me uncertain: Can I understand them? Do I interpret their stories in the correct way? These dilemmas were present throughout the research process. I could cooperate not only with the juveniles but with the teachers too. It was a great experience to see how we could work together in spite of the fact that we came from different areas – with some oversimplification: they represented practice and I represented theory. They draw my attention to the importance of presenting real practice to trainee teachers, and they made me see where a young man can get if help does not arrive on time. This meant a serious learning process for myself too. To sum up, during my research I came to the conclusion that the reformatory is a special world with its unique characteristics, which is little known – both from the perspective of education and jurisdiction, although it has a very important role in dealing with juvenile delinquency.

¹³ Idézi: Horsdal, M.: *Életút-történetek értelmezése és elemzése*. <http://www.nepfoiskola.hu/civil/3/3.1.3.htm>
Letöltés ideje: 2007. június 3.

7. *List of publications related to the theme of the dissertation*

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