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**Review of monograph:  
Iveta Kovalčíková, Juraj Kresila,  
“Izbrannyje kontexty reformy nacionalnoj  
programmy obrazovanja v Angliji i Slovakiji”  
[Selected Contexts of National Education  
Reform in England and Slovakia]**

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In 2012, the National Pedagogical University of Dragomanov in Kiev, Ukraine published the monograph written by two Slovak authors Iveta Kovalčíková and Juraj Kresila from the Faculty of Education, University of Prešov. The institution's interest in publishing *Izbrannyje kontexty reformy nacionalnoj programmy obrazovanja v Angliji i Slovakiji* was determined by the topicality of the analysed issues and the relevance that they bear to the Ukrainian education. The authors of the publication focused on the analysis of the conditions leading to successful school reform; the potential barriers to the implementation of the reforming efforts were identified by comparing the processes of education reform in England and Slovakia.

The publication of 96 pages is divided into three chapters.

In the first chapter, titled *Contextual Characteristics of an Education System*, the authors outline the characteristic features of the broader contexts which govern the system of education in the compared countries (England / Slovakia) including the curriculum as its integral part. They describe an area that is complementary to the concept of the curriculum and, together with it, represents an inherent component of the system of education. While the issues pertaining to the curriculum relate primarily to the technology of pragmatic transfer of knowledge, the wider context of education is a latent factor which affects the curriculum and has

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significant potential to saturate the educational effects. The authors point out that... "the analysis of the educational context or educational culture of the national systems of education in terms of the history, educational policies, and various philosophical underpinnings is instrumental in a critical assessment and comparison of the current state of education and developing the conception of education reform". In the historical outline, the authors provide an analysis of how educational aims and ideals can be promoted and pursued at the various levels of the education system. The phenomenon of "education reform" is presented as a process of gradual changes introduced both at the most general level and at the level of actual classroom. It is emphasized that education reform is not just a single and isolated event in time. The phase of implementing the proposed changes at the school level is as important as outlining the general concepts. As the authors state, in the process of creating a compact and coherent system of education, it is necessary that assigned teams of experts have their arguments favouring the same educational program theoretically grounded both at the level of educational aims and ideals, which influence the preferred values of the whole society, and at a specific level, in relation to describing the events in the classroom or school lab.

The second chapter is focused on the conceptual analysis of the curriculum as one of the factors of education. The authors describe the theoretical concept of curriculum and various sources for curriculum planning. Curricular inputs include the learning objectives and content of education. Curricular outcomes, which encompass standards and students' attainment, are important for designing the system of assessment. Interdisciplinary approaches to the curriculum are addressed at the end of the chapter.

A central part of this work, the third chapter, is focused on comparing the processes of education reform and the subsequent creation of the national curricula in England and Slovakia. The Slovak system of education which, corresponding to its regional traditions of Central and Eastern Europe, is represented by a strongly centralized system, is in the process of finding effective ways to decentralize itself. There is a rationale for decentralisation in this respect, since in a democratic and pluralistic

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society one can hardly find a unique and most effective model of education, which would be centrally prescribed and acceptable by everyone. The authors indicate that the English experience with education reform in the 1980s is an interesting comparative case study for Slovakia. The introduction of a standardized National Curriculum in England in the given period represented a shift from a heterogeneous and relatively autonomous system of education towards a more centrally administered system. The monograph can be inspiring for policy-makers in the countries of the former socialist bloc as it points to the fact that in these countries the issue of education reform is perceived by experts largely as a need to rebuild the system which was previously unchanged for decades. The long ignored field of education thus became central for professionals, politicians and the public in the second half of the first decade of the new millennium in Slovakia. However, since that time the first confrontations between the theorists' and politicians' ideas on how to reform education are also emerging in professional forums. The education reform which took place in England in the 1980s has been critically reviewed in the literature. The analysis presented in the book can be inspirational for the process of transforming education in the Slovak Republic but also in other former socialist countries. Iveta Kovalčíková and Juraj Kresila bring to our attention the arguments through which the need to introduce education reform was legitimised in Slovakia. They analyse the problems which were to be addressed and eliminated by education reform. They also summarise the conceptual starting points of the Slovak education system and comparatively evaluate the characteristics of both educational contexts - English and Slovak. In the last part of the publication, the authors focus on analysing the transformation of the Slovak system of education, particularly at the level of transforming the curriculum in primary schools.

The concept of the curriculum as the sum of student's experience is too extensive for the authors to analyse and comprehensively incorporate into the book. However, they point to the fact that each curricular transformation has its own agenda which policy-makers cannot ignore. Trends in education reform in post-socialist countries have thus become

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a legitimate focus for scholars and politicians. After years of isolation and stagnation, new conceptual education manifestos appear with the ambition to specify the steps necessary to make sure that the proposed system of education is comparable with those existing in the advanced democracies. However, because of the absence of immediate experience in the practical implementation of the educational agenda, the newly created conceptions of reform often seem to be too ambitious and pathetic in their rhetoric. Through the example of the complex and non-linear implementation of education reform in England and Slovakia, the authors in their analysis alert the actors of the reform in other national contexts of the need for *a much broader time horizon for the precise planning of successively following steps with an adequate timeframe provided for their subsequent implementation*, which would eventually lead to a consensus on the adopted national curriculum framework.

**Reviewed publication:**

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