

IN MEMORIAM BENŐ CSAPÓ (1953-2023)



Prof. Benő Csapó is mourned by his family, whose grief is shared by his friends, his colleagues at the Institute of Education and the Doctoral School of Education at the University of Szeged, his co-authors, and his fellow researchers. His seminal and widely cited studies, books, thoughts, and his values will stay with us and we will keep him in our fond memories. May he rest in peace.

It is with deep sorrow and heavy hearts that we inform all who knew, respected, and loved him that professor Benő Csapó, a most prominent researcher of education and teacher training passed away. He was one of the most distinguished and productive Hungarian and international researchers of learning and instruction, a force who created a scientific community. In his career spanning more than four decades he transformed educational research as well as pre- and in-service teacher training. In his work he focused on improving the effectiveness, quality, and efficiency of Hungarian public education. His national and international projects contributed considerably to the development of the field of educational assessment.

Benő Csapó's 70th birthday was an event celebrated by his students, friends, co-authors, colleagues and fellow researchers in March 2023¹. Guests arrived from all over the world to applaud his memorable achievements. He launched the careers of generations of teachers as well as professionals in the field of educational research and development. Until his death he was the president of the Dugonics Society (2019–), the head of the Research Programme for Public Education Development (2020–) and chair of the Public Education Presidential Committee (2022–) of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Benő Csapó started his studies at the General School of Szentgál, then continued his upper secondary education at the Lovassy László Gimnázium in Veszprém. He graduated as a teacher of chemistry and physics in 1977 from József Attila University, Szeged. He earned a doctoral degree in 1979, a candidate's degree in 1985, obtained the habilitation in 1996, and was awarded the title of the Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2002. Throughout his whole academic career he was affiliated with the University of Szeged, first as scientific assistant (1976), then assistant research fellow (1977), junior assistant professor (1979), senior assistant professor (1982), associate professor (1988), and full professor (1997); since March 2023 he was professor emeritus. He was the head of the Department of Education between 1995–1999 and 2006–2014 and of the Department of Learning and Instruction between 2014–2015. He established the Institute of Education in 2007 and was its head until 2017. He was the head of the Doctoral School of Education at its first accreditation in 2003 and directed it until 2022. 22 of his PhD students have earned their degrees, almost all of whom are working in higher education, and some of them are full professors of education.

¹ <https://folyoiratok.oh.gov.hu/uj-koznevelés/unnepi-konferencia-csapo-beno-tiszteletre>

He was a member of the Committee on Pedagogy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences from 1990 and he was the editor-in-chief of its journal *Magyar Pedagógia* from 1991. He joined the Presidential Committee on Public Education of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as a member in 2002, acted as its co-chair between 2017–2021, then held the position of its chair until his death. As the president of the first National Conference on Educational Sciences, organised under the auspices of the Committee on Pedagogy since 2001, professor Csapó took on a leading role in initiating, maintaining, and improving this conference to turn it into the most prestigious Hungarian annual event of the discipline.

In 2003 he launched the annual Conference on Educational Assessment (CEA) in Szeged, which was expanded into an international conference in 2012. In order to help Hungarian educational research join international trends more effectively, he organised an international workshop in 2009, the Szeged Workshop on Educational Evaluation (SWEE), the impact of which was so strong on international cooperation that it was organised again in the following seven years. During this time the original framework of intensive, small scale face to face consultations changed and the workshop was integrated into the bilingual CEA.

As the leader of the Research Programme for Public Education Development of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Benő Csapó made considerable contributions to the marked presence of Hungarian research in the international discourse and to the support and advancement of Hungarian communities of educational research.

He received the Humboldt Scholarship to spend a year as a researcher at the University of Bremen in 1989–90. In 1994–1995 he was a fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University. He participated in several international research projects. From 1988 to 1991 he ran the Hungarian leg of a study on learning mathematics led by the Center for Human Growth and Development (University of Michigan). Between 1997–1999 he participated in a program on the development of democratic thinking organised by the Institute for Educational Inquiry (University of Washington). He was the member of the OECD PISA team developing the framework of assessing problem solving between 2000–2004, then that of dynamic problem solving between 2009–2013. In 2009–2010 he was the leader of the Working Group on Technological Issues in the Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills program (Cisco, Intel, & Microsoft). Between 2012–2015 he was the leader of the work package for developing the framework of the Strategies for Assessment of Inquiry Learning in Science EU FP7 project. He was the representative of Hungary in the PISA Governing Board between 2005–2014 and the vice chair of the Board between 2008–2014.

Benő Csapó was the member of the editorial boards of the journals *Learning and Instruction*; *International Journal of Educational Research*; *Thinking Skills and Creativity*; *Cambridge Journal of Education*; *Educational Assessment*; *Journal of Education for Teaching*; *Technology, Knowledge and Learning*; *Journal of Dynamic Decision Making*; and the *European Journal of Psychology of Education*. The European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction elected him to be member of its Executive Committee twice (1997 and 1999). He was the president of the 2007 conference of this Association, held in Budapest (12th Biennial Conference for Research on Learning and Instruction).

From the 1990s on he led several large scale national projects, for example (1) the School Knowledge project; (2) the Hungarian Education Longitudinal Program run by the MTA-SZTE Research Group on the Development of Competencies (2003–); (3) Assessment and Differentiated Education of Disadvantaged Students, run by the Center for Research on Learning and Instruction (2003–2007); (4) Development of Diagnostic Assessment Systems, also run by the Center for Research on Learning and Instruction (phase one: 2009–2012, phase two: 2012–2015); and (5) Expansion of Diagnostic Assessment Systems (2017–2020).

As head of the MTA-SZTE Research Group on the Development of Competencies between 2001 and 2022, Benő Csapó launched the Hungarian Education Longitudinal Program (HELP). This program follows nationally representative samples with the primary aim of contributing to the understanding of the causes of academic failure and the mechanisms of academic delay by analysing and modelling individual developmental tracks. Data collections since 2003 with new cohorts added every four years make it possible to analyse the stability of phenomena and the effects of changes in the Hungarian school system. The program is unique both nationally and internationally. Also under the auspices of the Research Group on the Development of Competencies, he launched and directed the development of an online Test Battery of School Readiness to facilitate kindergarten to school transition.

He founded and headed the Center for Research on Learning and Instruction from 2003. Under his leadership, among others, the Center implemented the Development of Diagnostic Assessment Systems project in three phases between 2009 and 2020. The result is a complete national system that provides personalised feedback. All essential components of a diagnostic system were developed. Scientifically based standards were defined to provide foundations for diagnostic assessment. These enabled the creation of the eDia online platform and system, which is an internationally remarkable electronic assessment and evaluation system, relying on a bank of more than 20,000 interactive tasks to assess the skills and abilities of learners in grades 1–6, tracking individual development and diagnosing problems in learning. On Benő Csapó's initiative, the University of Szeged introduced voluntary competence tests for incoming first year students from 2015 using the eDia system.

He used his rich international network and body of work to connect Hungarian research on learning and instruction with the international mainstream, and in some areas with its front ranks. Through his theoretical and practice oriented studies, widely cited studies and books, and wide international network he initiated and facilitated the renewal of Hungarian research on learning and instruction and helped it become visible internationally. He undertook an important role in the reform of Hungarian public education, the implementation of research based teacher training, and the dissemination of scientific results. His main areas of research were cognitive development; the integration of the development of declarative and procedural knowledge; the organisation of knowledge; educational assessment; and technology based assessment. All his life he worked to secure greater support for empirical research in education and emphasised the paramount importance of the quality of teacher education. He often emphasised that investments in the improvement of the education system yield extraordinary returns and are able to set the economic development of a country on a new course. As he put it in a study in the Green Book for the Renewal of Public Education in Hungary, published in 2008 and still wholly relevant, "What remains in reserve for education development is to improve the efficiency of learning: students do not simply need to acquire more knowledge over the same interval of time spent at school but the knowledge acquired needs to be of much better quality, fully comprehended and ready to be applied more broadly. This objective — similarly to other areas of society and the economy — can only be achieved if the development process relies on scientific research. [...] The most important lesson learnt from international experiences is that intensive efforts are needed to achieve a breakthrough; minor adjustments, not even comparable to the gravity of the problem, cannot lead to success in this area. [...] Research should above all be targeted at solving problems, including providing assistance for the education of children of families in disadvantaged social positions, reducing the incidence of children dropping out of school and improving the quality of students' knowledge when they finally leave school."

Some of his most important books include: *A kombinatív képesség struktúrája és fejlődése* [*The Structure and the Development of Combinative Ability*] (Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988),

Kognitív pedagógia [Cognitive Pedagogy] (Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992), *A képességek fejlődése és iskolai fejlesztése [The Development of Competencies and Their Improvement in a School Context]* (Akadémiai Kiadó, 2003), *Tudás és iskola [Knowledge and School]* (Műszaki Kiadó, 2004). He edited the volumes *Az iskolai tudás [School Knowledge]* (Osiris, 1998), *Az iskolai műveltség [Literacy at School]* (Osiris, 2002), and *Mérlegen a magyar iskola [The Report Card of the Hungarian School]* (Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 2012). He was co-editor of the volumes *Teaching and Learning Thinking Skills* (Swets & Zeitlinger, 1999); *The Nature of Problem Solving: Using Research to Inspire 21st Century Learning* (OECD, 2017); and the nine volumes detailing the frameworks of the diagnostic assessment (2011–2015). The number of his academic publications is almost 550, with over 5,800 independent citations to them; his Hirsch index is 34.

He was awarded the Széchenyi Professorial Scholarship in 1997, the Prima Primiissima Award in 2015. He received the Freedom of the City award of Szeged in 2016 and of Szentgál in 2017. In 2019 he was awarded a Honorary Doctorate from the University of Helsinki. In 2022 he became member of the International Academy of Education.

His commitment was strong to the Institute of Education of the University of Szeged (formerly the Institute of Education and Psychology of József Attila University), where he worked since 1976 in spite of invitations from abroad. In a key role and with a strong personality, he helped and supported students, colleagues, and researchers studying and working around him. He was a driving force in the Szegedi Műhely, his ideas, opinions, and commitment to quality defining the path of this research community.

Benő Csapó loved art and was a good photographer. He passed on his passion for sailing to several of his colleagues and PhD students. With his wife he took motorcycle trips to many countries of the world. He loved quality and insisted on it in all fields of life. He was incredibly generous, and he put huge trust in people. His ability to remain calm and make responsible decisions in the most insane situations was exemplary. He was a true innovator. His work in academia, covering several research areas and rich in achievements, is inspiring to every researcher. On behalf of his several thousand students and colleagues, we say farewell to Benő. May he rest in peace.

Gyöngyvér Molnár

(Translated by Edit Katalin Molnár)