

DESCRIPTION OF THE “CENTRE FOR BASIC RESEARCH ON SCHOOLING” PROJECT

DAVID GREGER, TOMÁŠ JANÍK, JIŘÍ KOTÁSEK[†], JOSEF MAŇÁK,
ELIŠKA WALTEROVÁ

Basic Research Centres is a departmental programme of Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, which aims at encouraging the cooperation between research institutions in the Czech Republic, at enhancing their competitive strength in the European context and at contribute to the education of young researchers. Through competitive tendering, our project called Centre for Basic Research on Schooling (with abbreviation RECES) was granted under the registration number LC 06046 for the period of almost five years (March 3, 2006 to December 31, 2010). The aim of this study is to introduce to the reader the general concept of the RECES project (which in this text will be referred to as “the Centre”), namely with its aims and theoretical background. Individual outcomes, goals and methodological approaches employed in the project of the Centre will be introduced in separate studies that discuss the so-called partial aims of the project.

1. Fulfilling the goals of the Basic Research Centres project

As stated before, the three main general aims of the project of *Basic Research Centres* are:

- Cooperation between at least two institutions on a shared project
- Concrete cooperation with research institutions abroad
- Inviting and integrating doctoral students and young researchers into the project

Concrete steps in fulfilling these aims are described in the following paragraphs.

The basic general condition when applying for the project was that of at least two research institutions cooperating on the project. The Center, which is being introduced here, therefore interconnects two university-based institutions. One of them is the Institute for Research and Development of Education, at Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Education (referred to in this text as IRDE) and Educational Research Centre at the Faculty of Education of the Masaryk University in Brno (referred to in this text as CPV). Both these institutions are specialised research bodies and are situated at two largest faculties of Education in the Czech Republic that also educate young researchers in Education. They concentrate on very similar research topics, share a history of past projects on national basis, have common partner institutions outside the

Czech Republic, co-organise conferences, and are tied with bonds of mutual respect and methodological inspiration.

We find the idea of cooperation of several research institutions essential for future development of Educational science. In the Czech Republic, there is no institution that would concentrate on basic research in Education after the Pedagogický ústav Jana Ámose Komenského ČSAV (meaning Pedagogical institute at Czech Academy of Sciences) was closed in 1991. Research institutions at individual faculties of Education (or other) usually work on separate research projects that tend to be of shorter duration (2 or 3 years). One of the important benefits of the project is therefore the opportunity to create a large research team for the area of school education. It also is a great challenge and task for the project's team.

We find common ground in the research areas of the two institutions in the conception of school education with particular emphasis on its aims, content and process, while the IRDE concentrates mainly on the research of social determiners, structures and the project level of education, whereas in the research activities of the CPV analyses of the teaching and learning processes dominate with emphasis on specific content areas. Integrating these two approaches gives the RECES project a complex nature and enables us to penetrate the fundamentals of relationships between aims, contents and processes of school education. A shared project makes it possible for the two institutions to strengthen and develop ways of mutual cooperation and to generate capacities in creating common research teams.

Both institutions build on experience from a number of both, national and international research and developmental projects, the list of which is included in the paragraphs introducing both institutions, towards the end of the bulletin.

The second general aim of the Basic Research Centres projects is to enhance concrete cooperation with research institutions outside the Czech Republic. Both institutions have long traditions of cooperation with partners abroad, which will be further developed within the Centre's activities. Concrete cooperation with partners from abroad is the focus in fulfilling the aims of the project. In this text, therefore, we shall leave aside the members of the team's participation on international conferences, publishing papers in recognised international magazines, exchange stays, inviting speakers from outside the Czech Republic.

The focus of concrete cooperation with the abroad are the partial aims 1, 2, 3 and 7 of the RECES project, which are introduced in the individual studies that form a main part of this issue of *Orbis Scholae*. The partial aim 1 focuses on the development of educational systems in the Visegrád countries. The work will build on the publication *Reforms of Education in Central and Eastern Europe 1995*, which was prepared for the Council of Europe and describes schooling reforms that in middle and eastern Europe before 1995. Today, after 10 years, we find it important to discuss the convergent and

divergent tendencies in the recent development in the Visegrád countries. Active participation was promised by recognised researchers from all of the Visegrád countries, some of which will build on their work on the previous publication. The study will be published in English.

Pursuing the partial aim 2, analytic single studies on selected foreign educational systems intended for Czech readers will be published; on which authors from outside the Czech Republic were also invited to participate. This methodological approach should provide the Czech reader with an interesting point of view on the given educational system both from the inside and the outside perspective.

The partial aim 3 builds on an international project “Developing a sense of justice among disadvantaged students: the role of schools”, which was granted by the Council of Europe and which is being carried out at the IRDE in cooperation with research institutions from the United Kingdom, France, Belgium and Italy. The output of the project will be a large-scale quantitative research aimed at pupils’ perceptions of justice in school and in a school system. As a part of the Centre’s project, the team will organise an international conference on equity in education in Prague; the conference will host a number of invited speakers and distinguished guests and will be carried out in English.

The last concrete examples of international cooperation in the framework of the Centre will be the activities carried out when pursuing the partial aim 7. As in the previous text, they include cooperation with an institution outside the Czech Republic on a research project. More specifically the Centre’s team will cooperate with the Institute for Science Education in Kiel on a comparative research study of physics instruction in the Czech Republic and Germany; the research method employed will be video study based on a shared methodological approach. The video study project will run simultaneously in both countries and the Czech and German teams will meet on a yearly basis in Brno and Kiel. The shared project’s outcomes will be published in German at a round-up international symposium.

The third general aim of the *Basic Research Centres* project is to contribute to the training of young researchers. Indeed, an important perspective of the project of the Centre is training a new generation of Ph.D. students and young researchers in Education and providing help and encouragement to them.

It is a very important strategy of both of the institutions involved (IRDE and CPV) to train Ph.D. students in Education. The Centre will provide consultations, organise lectures, seminars and courses not only for internal doctoral students but also for all Ph.D. students in Education Science and Field Didactics from all faculties in the Czech Republic. Several doctoral students, whose dissertation projects are closely connected with the areas that the Centre is to cover, were invited to participate on the project. In the course of working on the project, both institutions will invite new Ph.D. students to collaborate on the project.

The Ph.D. students will participate in all international activities of the team and in developing and realising empirical research. They will present their own papers on methodological seminars and participate in the team's discussions. Members of the team are the supervisors, tutors, advisors, consultants and opponents of doctoral dissertations. The knowledge and experience gained in the project will be disseminated in courses that IRDE and CPV organise, especially in a theoretical and methodological course for young Ph.D. students. The Centre will also develop and assign prospective topics of doctoral dissertations that will fit in with the topic and aims of the project, thus strengthening the continuity of research work in the particular field.

In the previous paragraphs we have discussed the three main general aims that characterise the *Basic Research Centres* projects and shown how we shall pursue them in the project of the Centre for Basic Research on Schooling. To conclude, we may say that by uniting the two institutions (IRDE and CPV) in the project of the Centre new possibilities open for strong and systematic cooperation in comparative and empiric research and for presentation of the project's outcomes to the international research community.

The following text briefly describes the aims and content of the project, which will later be discussed in separate chapters.

2. Specific aims of the RECES project

The RECES project builds mainly on the project "Development of National Education and the Professionalization of Teachers in European Context" (IRDE, finished in 2004) and the project "Content dimension of basic school curriculum" (CPV). The general aim of the project is following:

"To gain new theoretical knowledge on structures, aims, contents and processes of school education in the context of economical, social and cultural changes in the society and to formulate recommendations for educational policy and practice in schools".

In the focus of theoretical reflection and research, there will be the structure, aims, contents and processes of school education in the context of current social dynamics. Research activities will be covering these closely interconnected areas:

- *adapting the structures of school education to social demands*
- *aims, contents and processes of school education and the possibilities of innovations*
- *the school as a learning organisation, possibilities and obstacles in its development*

The outputs from the first area will concentrate on the transformation of the educational systems in Visegrád countries (partial aim 1) and in other selected European

countries (partial aim 2 – Germany, Great Britain, Sweden) and on an analysis of fulfilling the idea of equity in education (partial aim 3). The second thematic area an analysis will be carried out of the demands of selected social groups on school education (partial aim 4) and a theoretical model of curricular development will be introduced (partial aim 6). This area will also provide a complex analysis of the teaching and learning processes (partial aim 7). The third thematic area will concentrate on the school as an organisational unit and the method of case studies will be used to examine both the outer and inner factors that influence its reality (partial aim 5). The focus will lie in identifying types of those activities in the school's microenvironment that support its development. The basic research will concentrate on school education on the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary level. Tertiary education as well as other levels of education lie outside the main scope and framework of the Centre's project.

Individual partial aims of the Centre's project were formulated as follows.

Partial aim 1

To carry out a comparative study analysing and assessing the development and present state of the educational systems of the transforming societies in the Visegrád countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) between 1989 and now.

Partial aim 2

To prepare analytic single studies about the educational systems in selected European countries whose schooling systems differ from the others.' These studies will also include comparisons with the Czech educational system.

Partial aim 3

To critically analyse the state of fulfilling the principle of equity in education in educational systems in selected European countries based on data from empirical research and to propose educational strategies enhancing social cohesion in the society.

Partial aim 4

To carry out analysis of various social groups' demands on school education (parents, pupils, teachers, headmasters, etc.) in the Czech Republic on the basis of an empirical study and to find out how content they are with the schools fulfilling educational aims.

Partial aim 5

Through the method of case studies to propose a system of both outer and inner factors that influence the reality and development of the Czech school at the beginning of the 21. century.

Partial aim 6

To propose a theoretical model of general education curriculum development with respect to the needs of the "knowledge society" and to define methods that lead to acquiring the key competencies.

Partial aim 7

To create a methodological approach of complex analysis of teaching and learning processes in respect to the content specifics and to apply it to the analysis of the teaching processes in specific educational areas.

A detailed description of the partial aims of the project are included in the seven studies in this issue of *Orbis Scholae* that deal with the aims and goals of each individual partial aim, description of the present state in the field, methodological approaches and expected outputs and outcomes of the partial aim.

Towards the end of this introductory text we briefly include the main expected outputs of the project.

The key outputs of the project will above all be monographs, the topics and scopes of which are described in individual partial aims. In the course of the project, at least 11 monographs will be published, one of which will be in English and published with a recognised publisher outside the Czech Republic, and another in German. Other monographs will be published in Czech and will be accompanied with English summary. Three of these will be published with the Paido publishing house in Brno. The Centre will also publish three 200 pages issues of the *Orbis scholae* bulletin a year. Starting from the year 2007, one issue every year will be in English. One international seminar and four conferences will be organised, two of which intended for Czech research community and two on international bases with English as the language of the presentations. Four conference proceedings will be published in the form of CD-ROMs.

Apart from the key outputs, the Centre's team will publish partial results of the project in studies and articles in Czech and European journals, and research reports and methodological recommendations for school practice at the Centre's web pages. The achieved outcomes will be published in such forms that they reach other research and user institutions, will be presented at conferences, seminars and workshops organised by the Centre. New strategies of implementation of research results into educational policy and school practice will be proposed.

All activities of the Centre will be monitored by the Centre's Council, which will consist of the members of the Centre's team, representatives of the host institutions (Charles University, Faculty of Education and Masaryk University, Faculty of Education), representatives of other universities and of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The Centre is also supported by distinguished fellow researchers in Education. The list of the members of the Centre's Council and consultant guarantors see below.

The Centre's Council

The Centre's Council is a body of eleven representatives (members of the team, representatives of the host institutions, selected users of the expected outcomes of the

project. The Centre's Council meets twice a year. The purpose of the Council and the manner of proceeding are stated in the Statute of the Centre's Council and the Proceeding Regulations that the Council authorised during the first meeting and are available on the internet pages at <http://www.pedf.cuni.cz/reces> in the Centre's Council section.

The members of the Centre's Council

Chair of the Council:

- **prof. PhDr. Zdeněk Helus, DrSc.** – Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Education

Members of the Council:

- **Mgr. David Greger, Ph.D.** - Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Education
- **doc. PaedDr. Josef Horák, CSc.** – Technical University in Liberec, Faculty of Education
- **PhDr. Martin Chvál, Ph.D.** – the head of CERMAT
- **PhDr. Tomáš Janík, M.Ed., Ph.D.** - Masaryk University in Brno, Faculty of Education
- **prof. PhDr. Beata Kosová, CSc.** - Matej Bel University, Faculty of Education - Banská Bystrica, Slovakia
- **doc. PhDr. Jiří Němec, Ph.D.** - Masaryk University in Brno, Faculty of Education
- **prof. PhDr. Karel Rýdl, CSc.** – University of Pardubice, Faculty of Humanities
- **doc. PaedDr. Iva Stuchlíková, CSc.** – University of South Bohemia, Pedagogical Faculty
- **Dr. Botho von Kopp** - Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung (DIPF) - Frankfurt, Německo
- **doc. PhDr. Walterová Eliška, CSc.** - Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Education

The Centre's Consultant guarantors

The following distinguished researchers were invited to cooperate on the project as consultant guarantors:

- **prof. Cesar Birzea, Ph.D.** – University of Bucharest, Romania
- **prof. Dr. Pertti Kansanen, Dr.h.c.** – University of Helsinki, Finland
- **prof. PaedDr. Jiří Kotásek, CSc.[†]** - Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Education, CR
- **prof. PhDr. Josef Maňák, CSc.** - Masaryk University in Brno, Faculty of Education, CR
- **prof. Dr. Wolfgang Mitter, Dr.h.c.** - DIPF - Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung, SRN