
IN PURSUIT OF EDUCATIONAL CHANGE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract: *This study, using a common theoretical framework, analyses the process of educational change in the Czech Republic since the political changes in 1989. It starts with a brief introduction to the country and its educational system. Its main concern is focused on the phases and particular dimensions of the transformation process in school education at the primary and secondary level. Social and political incoherence, non-linearity, imbalances, atomization and diffusion as a consequence of tensions between continuity and discontinuity are identified as characteristic features of the process. In spite of positive shifts concerning educational policy, legislation, management, financing regulation, the curriculum, teacher professionalisation and support structure development, there are still barriers, e.g. lack of political consensus and the lack of a steering and monitoring mechanism in the educational sector. Real systemic reform reaching the intermediate and microlevels of the educational system has not been implemented yet.*

Key words: *social transition, Czech Republic, educational system, school education, educational policy, process of transformation, dimensions of transformation, systemic reform, education change*

Eighteen years have passed since 1989, when the Czech Republic underwent transition from a totalitarian political system and centrally planned, state-owned economy to democratic governance respecting human rights, the restoration of private ownership and a market economy. The changes also affected the education sector which, until then, was under the exclusive control of the central power. The present still shows some traces of the past. This is why we are concerned with the educational transformation process, its general analysis documented by examples from a different dimension of education. What are the phases of transformation that we can identify from its 18-year-lifespan? Which trends and directions can be traced in it? Who were the main agents leading the change? What are the significant changes in Czech education? These are the general questions related to the theory of transformation which we touch upon in this study.

More particularly we examine the present status of the Czech education system, using the common theoretical framework of transformation based on phases of deconstruction, partial stabilization, reconstruction and implementation. The selected ten dimensions of transformation are used to document the ongoing transformation process from 1989 to the present.

1. Historical Background to the Czech Republic and Basic Information

Historically the formation of the Czech state has its roots in the 10th century, but its full existence dates from 1212 till 1526. The highest level of development on the territory was reached during the reign of Charles IV (1346 - 1378), when a university, the first one in Central Europe, was established in Prague. From 1526 to 1918 the historical territory of the Czechs came under Habsburg rule. Strong action against the forces of reformation was taken between 1620 and 1781, when the Law of Tolerance was enacted. The Czech National Enlightenment started after this act. In this movement the Czech language and national education played a significant role. From the second half of the 18th century to the first half of the 20th century the Czech territory was an area where the processes of industrialization and urbanization took place. After World War I, in 1918 the Czechoslovak Republic was established. The formation of the state was a pragmatic political solution. However in the inter-war period, Czechoslovakia was one of the most developed countries in the world, while education was based on cultural tradition, humanistic ideals and national principles. The hopeful period was paralyzed by German occupation in 1938 when the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was decreed and Slovakia became a separate state subordinated to Hitler's Germany. In 1945 the Czechoslovak Republic was renewed and equal rights in the economy and in the social and cultural sphere were confirmed. The Communist reversal in 1948 started the socialist period. International, cultural and political isolation and being tied in to the Soviet orbit lasted four decades. The short period of the „Prague Spring 1968“ was crudely and violently interrupted by the armies of the Warsaw Pact. The only result was the Proclamation on the Czechoslovak Federation. This federative order lasted till 1992. On 17 November 1989, when the quietly gathered students were attacked by police, the „Velvet Revolution“ started.

The process of social change represented a development similar to that of other countries in transition (see Průcha, Walterová, 1992), but the country was split into two independent states. The Czech Republic (further CR) has existed since 1st January 1993. Its surface area of 78,886 km² places the country among those that are relatively small. Prague, the capital, with a population of 1.3 million, is a unique treasure of cultural history and the centre of a rich cultural life. Prague and 13 regions create together the administrative units of the Czech Republic. The official language is Czech, a West slavic language. The currency unit is the Czech „koruna“ , CZK (1 euro is about 27.5 CZK). The CR is a parliamentary democracy with the President as the head of the state. The Parliament has two Chambers: the Chamber of Deputies (200 members elected for a four-year term) and the Senate (81 Senators elected for a six-year term). The present government (since 2006) is composed of a Coalition of the Czech Civic Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic Party and the Greens. The CR has 10.3 million inhabitants with a population density of 131/km². Most inhabitants are of the Czech nationality, while other nationalities make up about 6%, including Slovak (3.1%), Polish (0.6%), German (0.5%) and Romany

(0.3%) minorities. The most serious concern is demographic development. Recent decades have seen a rapid drop in the birth rate and a decrease in mortality (life expectancy has increased to 74 years for men, 79 years for women), making the CR a country with one of the oldest populations in Europe. The proportion of the population of working age will decrease, and this will impact negatively on many areas of society, e.g. labour market, social and health care and services.

2. The Education System

The Czech education system provides education from pre-primary to tertiary level and accompanying services, extracurricular activities and school catering. **Pre-primary education** for children aged 3 to 6 is provided by kindergartens (*mateřská škola*) and is considered an important part of the school system. It is not compulsory, but most children attend it at the discretion of parents, and almost all five-year-olds. The last year of pre-school education is free. The Framework Educational Programme is developed centrally and every school then elaborates its own programme according to their own needs and conditions. **Compulsory education** lasts normally nine years from the age of 6 till 15, but 25% of children start school attendance later. The basic school (*základní škola*), with a single structure, provides the whole range of compulsory education in most cases, though in some villages only the primary stage. A small proportion of pupils is able to attend basic schools providing extended language teaching after third grade. About 10% of selected pupils leave basic schools after five or seven years for a 'gymnasium', and a small number of gifted pupils for a dance conservatoire, and finish their compulsory education there. Home schooling is a legal option for the primary stage of education. Pupils are assessed by marks (scale 1-5) or verbally. The drop-out rate in basic education is very low (lesser than 1%), while grade repetition is possible only once at one stage. Lower secondary education (the second stage of basic school) is provided by teachers specialising in particular subjects.

Upper secondary education is undertaken by nearly the whole age group after completion of basic education. The system is heavily differentiated according to content, duration and leaving examinations. There are following types of schools: **higher stage of secondary general school**, (*gymnazium*), lasting four years, completed by a secondary leaving examination (*maturitní zkouška*). This school prepares students mostly for higher education.

Technical secondary education has a deep tradition in the country. It usually takes place at the technical secondary school (*střední odborná škola*) lasting four years. The education contains general, technical and practical subjects and leads to the secondary leaving examination (*maturitní zkouška*) which allows entry to all types of higher education.

Vocational secondary education lasts mostly three or two years. An apprenticeship certificate (*výuční list*) facilitates transition into a qualified occupation. Some programmes are completed only by a final exam (*závěrečná zkouška*) and allow entry into an occupation which demands mostly manual work.

All upper secondary schools can offer **post-secondary education** in follow-up programmes (*nástavbové studium*) completed by a secondary school-leaving examination allowing its holders to enter tertiary education. **Performing arts education** takes place at conservatoires and prepares students in music, dance, singing and drama. The programme lasts six years.

Schools for pupils with special education needs exist from pre- primary to upper secondary education. The education is accommodated to students' needs and has the same value as education in mainstream schools. The progressive trend is to integrate pupils with special needs into the mainstream schools. Tertiary professional schools (*Vyšší odborné školy*) prepare students for demanding occupations not requiring a higher education degree. The *absolutorium* (professional examination – *odborná zkouška*) involves assessment in vocational subjects and foreign languages and the defence of a thesis. A certificate is awarded confirming the title of specialist with a diploma (DiS). Students are required to pay fees.

The secondary school-leaving examination (*maturitní zkouška*) from any type of school allows the students to apply for **higher education**. In the Czech Republic there are 20 public, 40 private and 2 state higher education institutions. In line with Bologna Declaration university programmes have been transformed in terms of a three-level structure: Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral studies. There are exceptions in some fields (medicine, pharmacy, primary school teaching) providing extensive studies only at Master's level. Every study programme has to be accredited by the Accreditation Commission of MoEYS. The study provided by public and state higher education institutions in Czech is free of charge. Programmes in English and German, which are gradually expanding, charge tuition fees.

The Czech education system is centrally governed and monitored by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) which is responsible for formulating the relevant educational policy documents and for framework educational programmes. MoEYS also allocates funds to regional authorities. Local municipalities are responsible for setting up pre-school education, basic schools and school facilities. Regional authorities set up secondary schools and tertiary professional schools. Private and denominational schools, set up by their founders, are represented mostly at the upper- secondary level. The quality of every school at levels 0-3 (ISCED) is controlled by the Czech School Inspectorate, independently of the state. Public schools are free. Private schools charge fees and receive their funding according to a special regulation. Denominational schools get subsidies directly from MoEYS. The funding of all schools is based on the per capita method. Citizens of EU member states can attend schools under the same conditions as Czech citizens. Minorities have the right to learn their languages in schools. Some schools provide teaching in minority languages. A few bilingual secondary general schools exist, mostly in large cities.

3. The Transformation of the Czech Education System from 1989 till 2007

The Czech Republic underwent in 1989 transition from a totalitarian political system and centrally planned, state-owned economy to democratic governance respecting human rights, the restoration of private ownership and a market economy. The changes also affected the education sector which, until then, was under the exclusive control of the central power. The transition thus started the large education transformation process that could be schematically divided into four phases.

The first, earliest, phase of the educational transformation lasted only few months just after the political turnover in 1989, and within our common theoretical framework it is called **deconstruction**. This early period is well recognized and documented in all societies in transition – Birzea (1996) labelled this early period *de-structuring* and Čerych et al. (2000) termed it as *a period of annulation or correction*.

The main aim of this period was immediately to redress the most visible shortcomings in education caused by the totalitarian regime. *De-ideologisation* of the legal documents, including curricula programmes, and *de-monopolisation* of state education, facilitating the setting up of private and denominational schools, and stipulating that parents and students should be free in their choice of an educational route and school, were among the most important tasks of this first stage of transformation. Rigid political and ideological control of the system was replaced by the broad school autonomy that Čerych (2000) characterized as “unusually large and unparalleled in many western European countries.” School autonomy concerns a wide range of competencies from curriculum determination to admission requirements and the content of examinations. Čerych (ibid.) argues that such school autonomy that represented a complete departure from the old system was the key factor in the bottom-up nature of the reform process in the first phases of educational transformation in the Czech Republic. Among other forms of direct action negating some features of the old education system built into the previous regime, we could mention abolition of the mandatory centrally prescribed number of pupils admitted to different types of schools, or allowing the teaching of other foreign languages than Russian, which was often the only foreign language taught.

However as pointed by Kotásek, Greger and Procházková (2004), some measures within the first wave of reforms had destructive effects (e.g. abolition of the institutional system for in-service teacher training or reducing the level of public pre-school education).

Other measures prompted the *restoration* of the traditional *gymnázia* (secondary grammar schools, called *multi-year gymnázia*) operating on the basis of early selection and segregation of children with high cultural capital (at the age of 11), but failed, among other things, to restore the status of teachers as state (public) employees with appropriate remuneration. In the first stage of transformation,

and even later, there was no doubt that most of the measures were necessary and fruitful. The trend of "*negating the past and restoring the 'status quo ante'*" was pursued – particularly in political and academic circles - with the lack of profound knowledge of West-European and global developments in education policies and without a constructive view of the long-term prospects of the development of democratic schooling.

The second phase (1991 – 2000) of educational transformation in the Czech Republic was labelled by Kotásek, Greger and Procházková (2004) **partial stabilization**. After the first most urgent and quickly made changes in education during the deconstruction phase, the partial stabilization period was characterized by the changes through gradual, partial legislative, organisational and pedagogical measures. The trend of retaining the "status quo" with a deliberate partial adaptation to new conditions was promoted, above all, by representatives of school administration and conservative teachers. This period was still mainly one of bottom-up reform, where the main changes and innovations were promoted by individual, institutional and local activities. Reforms were mainly spontaneous, arising from the pedagogical terrain and later based on operational, "*ad hoc*" measures. Partial stabilization is reflected at the legislative level by several amendments to the Education Act dating from the communist period. Among the key players in policy making at that time the role of private associations like NEMES, PAU and IDEA has to be mentioned. These agencies and other expert teams were preparing their proposals for the reform of Czech education where the state did not play yet the leading role in middle and long-term educational policy development. These proposals prompted discussion on the future of Czech education and the first programme for the reform of education entitled "Quality and Accountability" was prepared by MoEYS in 1994. Even though this report had no direct influence on education, it was the first attempt to formulate a comprehensive policy with a long-term perspective. Thus the second half of the 1990's could be perceived as a turning point in policy formulation, where the State, represented by MoEYS, started to play a steering role in the process.

Public opinion polls analyzing the demand for schooling from different stakeholders were conducted from 1995 till 1999 (for more see Kotásek, Greger, Procházková 2004; Walterová, Černý 2006). Knowledge of international and global trends in education was fostered by the active involvement of the Czech Republic in international large-scale studies of student achievement (e.g. TIMSS 1995, 1998; CivEd 1999; RLS 1995; PIRLS 2001; PISA 2000, 2003 – for summary of results see Straková 2003), and participation in other OECD projects, especially Reviews of national policies for education (in the Czech republic 1996, 1999). The other driving force of internationalization was the negotiations and preparations for EU accession at that time. This led to the preparation of the extensive strategic document *Czech Education & Europe* (1999).

Thus the second half of the 1990s was not only characterized by the partial adaptation and implementation of the changes required by the overall social transformation, but it was mainly the preparatory period for the next (third) phase

of transformation - **reconstruction**. Here it is obvious that the placing of the phases of transformation on the time line is a difficult endeavour, as there are no static lines and borders. Thus the other possibility is to consider the phase of partial stabilization only for the first half of 1990's and to consider the second half of the decade as already being the start of the reconstruction phase. The blurring of the borders between the different phases and their overlapping nature is even more obvious if we take into account different the dimension of education transformation (e.g. curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, structure of education system, as discussed below), where different developments did not reach the same stage at the same time. The discussions about the future of national education were, according to Kotásek (2005a,b), started in the second phase of transformation and they came to a head in the next reconstruction phase, when the White Book (MoEYS 2001), the Long-Term Plan for the Development of Education and the Education System in the Czech Republic, (MoEYS 2002) was prepared and approved by the government and later followed in 2004 by the new Educational Acts (Educational Act - The collection of Laws on Pre-school, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education No. 561/2004, and Collection of Laws on Pedagogical Staff No. 563/2004). According to Kotásek (ibid.) the last phase of transformation lasts from 2005 onwards and is the period of **implementation** of the systemic reform prepared in the previous reconstruction phase. This leads us to a conclusion similar to that of other Visegrád countries, namely that *systemic reform has not yet been achieved and thus the transformation process is still seen as an open-ended process*.

Analyses of the process of transformation have so far been rather static and sketchy. To clarify it more effectively, we shall point out some important obstacles to this schematic understanding of the lively process of change that started from spontaneous initiatives. Changes are still happening at the micro or intermediate level, even though the macro level seems to be now in its final phase, ready for implementation. What is more, the implementation process is not easy, especially for top-down reforms where it presents special difficulties. Critics of the reforms (most often articulating their concerns in the domain of curriculum and evaluation) argue that the reforms are not well prepared and, in particular, have not been explained and communicated to the wider public (parents and other stakeholders) and teachers are not ready to accept these reforms. Thus the process of implementation is long-term and there is a need for well developed support structures.

A detailed explanation of the educational transformation has also not been sufficiently elaborated within the context of national politics. The preparation of systemic reform was made during the long period when the Social Democrats held power (even though the government was a coalition with other parties) lasting from 1998 till 2006. After the last election the leading party in government became the conservative Civic Democratic Party, that has some other priorities and the reform that was prepared to be implemented is itself being reformed. Thus we might be observing the *reforms of reform*, or what Birzea (1996) calls a *counter-reform*. The most visible 'counter-reform' is in the field of evaluation (see below), where many measures prepared by the previous government and codified in law

have been postponed or are being gradually wound up. For understanding the process of educational transformation in the Czech Republic we shall thus analyze the *tension between continuity and discontinuity*, which is considered to be the main feature of transition (for example Birzea, Mitter). The current stage of development of education we could see as either an implementation phase that requires a lot of effort and time, or as a process of redefinition and reformulation of systemic reform. For both alternatives there are several obstacles to policy formulation or implementation, e.g. finances, management, but especially human resources. The risk of reforming the reforms over and over again is thus the biggest obstacle to any change. It might lead to disconnection of the macro from the micro level and thus prevent change taking place as it has been designed to do.

Educational transformation thus must be seen as an ongoing process, connecting the micro, intermediate and macro level. The process is more a spiral than a linear process. The question posed in our study, which is in line with other countries' reports, is: 'When do we reach the stage of systemic reform, and will we ever do so?'. In other words when will we have not just a plan for reform, but the reform itself, reform that will lead to a democratic, equitable, and quality education system for all citizens. The dilemma of implementation or re-reformation makes visible the importance of the setting clear goals for the transformation that must be shared or accepted among the policy makers and above all by political parties, teachers, parents and students.

4. Dimensions of Transformation

In the following paragraphs we are going to analyze the development of the Czech educational system and its current state by focusing on the most relevant problem areas, the dimensions of transformation.

4.1. Aims and Functions of Education

The fundamental principles concerning education have been included in the new Constitution of the Czech Republic (Constitution Act No. 1, 1993). The counterpart of the Act is the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. The right of education is ensured for all citizens of the Czech Republic and persons legally staying on the territory of the state. Public education at primary and secondary level has to be free. The state support of education, e. g. materials, methodical, information or psychological assistance is ensured under particular conditions. A key legislative framework has been created by the Education Acts. During the 1990s several amendments to the Education Act confirmed changes in the aims and functions of education reflecting broader societal context.

The impact of democratization and deideologization in society, the liberalization of the economy and political plurality have influenced discussion on the functions and aims of education. The main aim of education in the former Czechoslovakia, managed under a single central political and ideological leadership, was focused

on preparing children and young people for life and work in a „developed socialist society“ and on preparing them „for the defense of the socialist homeland“. Dramatic political discussions concerning education during the 1990s oscillated between neoliberal and social state positions, preferring individual or social values of education. The broader, consensual, framework for the functions and general aims of education is reflected in the White Book (2001). The starting point of educational aims has been „*the human as a person and his relation to society and the natural order*“ (White Book 2001, p. 13). Education is a fundamental and universal human value. The aims and functions of education are derived from both individual and social needs.

Contributing parties to education are the family and social institutions (schools and other institutions) as well as citizen groups. These parties influence the social aims and functions of education in certain phases of the human life cycle.

The educational system has to focus on the following aims (White Book 2001, p. 14–15):

- to develop human individuality by an approach that recognises the importance of cognitive, psychomotoric and affective cultivation
- to transfer the culture in historic continuity, develop the national identity and to protect cultural heritage
- to protect the living environment and the sustainable development of society
- to support the cohesion of society
- to educate for partnerships, cooperation and solidarity in European and global society
- to increase economic competitiveness, social prosperity and employability.

Generally formulated educational aims are transformed and made concrete in legislative and programme documents concerning particular levels of the educational system (Education Acts, Framework and School Education Programmes ... etc.).

The functions of contemporary Czech schooling reflects dynamic change in social demands, a dramatic development of knowledge and technologies, economic competition, increasing social differences, changes in social models (particularly the family), ecological distress etc. The importance of the ethical, protective, ecological, diagnostic and methodological functions of schooling has increased alongside traditional processes of socialization, aculturation and professionalisation. Economic and political functions are interpreted in a new way stressing effectiveness and equity in education.

4.2. Educational Management and Administration

The state regulation of the education system has been reshaped in accordance with overall changes in the central role of the state in the management of public affairs. The process of building a new mechanism for an effective state role in managing a decentralized system of educational administration has entailed the

erosion of the authoritative position of the political centre.

Until 2000 school management was separated from the overall system of public administration. It was a particular system of administration managed by the Ministry of Education. The reform of public administration introduced a principle of self-regulation. This changed the system of educational management and the nature of the state's steering role in the whole process radically. The current framework was established by the Act on Public Administration and Self-regulation (*Act No 132/2000*). The act devolved responsibility for education and school management to lower levels of administration.

The key role of the centre now is to coordinate, regulate and distribute funds within its position as the possessor of overall budgetary control. The preference for understanding the state's task in terms of overall conceptual, legislative, monitoring and steering activities allows it to abandon a huge number of its precious duties where operational details had to be determined from the centre. Its central organ, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, is responsible for a rather broad area of public affairs. Concerning school education, the main task of the Ministry has been to develop long-term and medium-term Programmes of Educational Development for particular sectors of education, to monitor and improve the school network, to monitor the results of evaluation from different levels of the educational system and results of the Czech school inspectorate which is an independent institution.

The Ministry ensures the share of finances for education in the national budget and formulates standards for the distribution of them. The important role of the Ministry has to lie in the whole of human resources development policy and in cooperation with other sectors (particularly social and labor affairs, health and some economic sectors). Communication with the public, media and representatives of civic society (parents, church, teacher associations, academic community and others) is an important task of the centre. Unfortunately, cooperation and communication with partners has become rather fragmented. This is because a regular steering consultative organ, such as the National Council for Education (planned in the White Book), does not yet exist. The temporary Consultative Council for Educational Policy, functioning in the period 1998 - 2000, when the national strategy of educational development was formulated, ceased to operate after the White Book was improved by the Czech Government. Since 2004 the Ministry has started to apply Framework programmes supported by the European Social Fund after the Czech Republic's entry to the European Union. The Ministry is responsible for operational programmes concerning education and research, for project selection and management, and also for the distribution of finances to project holders.

Concerning decentralization, the lower levels of management and administration have increased their responsibilities and rights in decisions on education. Regional representatives have full responsibility for the formulation, realization and evaluation of educational policy in particular regions. Regional offices, together with school departments, prepare long-term plans for regional educational development, elaborate annual reports (every two years), manage regional school budgets and administer the distribution of public finances. Analyses of

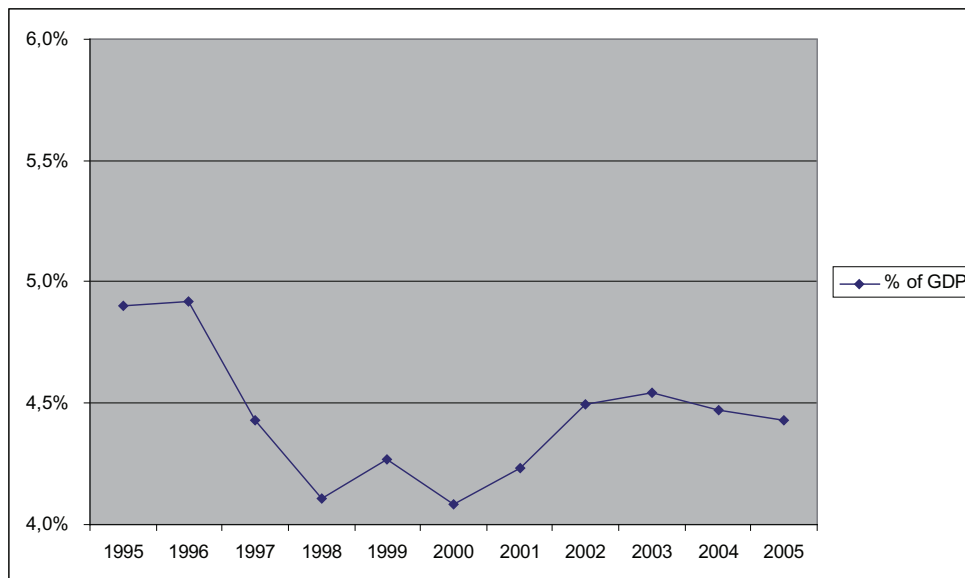
school capacities, educational opportunities, school network development and school accessibility, evaluation of the quality of schooling and staff development, and also the insertion of school leavers into the labour market are among the duties of regional offices, demanding their attention and responsibility. Regional authorities set up secondary public schools and tertiary professional schools, and are responsible for providing the accompanying school facilities. Private and denominational schools, represented mostly at the upper secondary level, are also under regional supervision. Local municipalities are responsible for setting up nurseries, basic schools and the accompanying school facilities necessary at local level.

The process of decentralization has required the development of indirect instruments of educational administration and a new mechanism different from the previous one which emphasised the role of national authorities and central control. The strengthening of responsibilities and decision making at lower levels has caused difficulties and controversy. These relate to performance levels of the new mechanism and the diversified roles of educational management at certain levels. To rationalize the activities of the Ministry as a central institution means according new roles which demand restructuring of the office and requalification for officers. New qualifications are also demanded by regional management and administration which face changing conditions, new demands and professional competences. This was the reason for the extensive development of study programmes and courses of school management. Currently discussion on the reinforcement of regional responsibilities in educational management has continued and relations and communication with the centre are at the centre of attention of regional representatives.

4.3. Financing the School System

Financing educational systems is one of the important dimensions to be tackled when describing educational transformation. The total public expenditure on education relative to GDP in the Czech Republic was in 1995 – 4.8% of GDP; in 2000 – 3.8% of GDP and in 2003 – 4.3% of GDP (OECD 2006). Public expenditure on education gradually rose after 1989 and reached its peak in 1995. 1994 and 1995 are viewed as a period of high economic growth in the Czech Republic, but following the exchange rate crisis in May 1997, the “government packages” in spring 1997, which were aimed at maintaining the balanced government budget and thus introducing radical budget cuts, had negative effects on the educational budget as well. The Governmental long-term strategic document – White Book (2001) - sets the aim of raising public expenditure on education to 6% of GDP. Even though we could observe (see Figure 1) a positive trend of rising expenditure following 2001, the target of 6% of GDP is still beyond our present reach. What is more, we have not yet reached even the level of the middle 1990s.

Figure 1. The total public expenditure on education relative to GDP in the in the Czech Republic from 1995 till 2005



Source: ÚIV: Vývojová ročenka školství 1995/1996 - 2004/2005

Public expenditure on education is just one macro level indicator of the relative importance and priority devoted to education according to international benchmarks. But for the understanding of educational transformation it is important to have a look especially at the reforms of financing that have taken place since 1989. The most striking change appeared during the very early phase of transformation in 1992 when **per capita funding** (so-called normative financing) was introduced. Until 1991 index financing of institutions was used, mainly based on the size of the budget used by a school in previous years, without taking into account any performance criteria. Per capita funding was introduced as a form of performance financing, in that the number of students was taken to be a main indicator for the financing the schools. The introduction of normative financing has led to competition among schools aiming to attract as many students as possible. This is the so-called "fight for the student" which is even more intense because of the demographic fall in the relevant population cohorts. The new system of financing was received favourably because it supported the demand-sensitive nature of the educational system and made the voices of parents and students more powerful.

There is one more principle used for allocating funds to schools that is not based on per-capita financing. A huge volume of funds is administered separately and earmarked for innovation and development programmes. These funds are targeted to stimulate initiatives taken by those schools which sign up for state-run programmes, and which will themselves define the specific innovation program. The aim is to help schools tap their creative potential and focus their activities on

new aims. The establishment of such innovation and development programmes represents a key instrument of indirect management of education and facilitates the implementation of processes perceived as necessary by central government for the educational development and desirable change. In largely decentralized systems this is an effective way of pursuing reforms from above. In the current situation many such innovations are financed from European Union structural funds.

4.4. Changes in the Structure of the Education System

The current shape of the educational system was briefly described in chapter 2 in this paper (a more detailed description can be found on the 'Eurybase' site, see *The Education System in the Czech Republic 2005/2006*). Our aim in this section is not to give a detailed description of all types of institution, but rather to choose the most striking examples of structural reforms and changes that will add another stone into the overall mosaic of the transformation process.

The structural reforms are the most visible changes. They could be undertaken as comprehensive and holistic reforms of the whole educational structure (as is probably the case with Poland), or they might be represented by rather moderate changes (prolonging the length of compulsory education or at some particular levels of education, e.g. prolonging primary education from 4 to 5 years and extending the length of basic school from 8 to 9 years, as happened in the Czech republic). These reforms are most visible in the case of the creation and development of new types of educational institutions. In the development of the Czech Republic this is the case especially for multi-year gymnázia and tertiary professional schools.

The **multi-year gymnázia** (these are multi-year general secondary schools with an academic orientation, lasting 8 or 6 years in most cases, combining both lower and upper secondary education) which had operated in Czechoslovakia until 1948, were re-established by a 1990 amendment to the Education Act. Restoration of the multi-year gymnázia is the most striking example of the trend of *negating the past and restoring the 'status quo ante'* that was widely used during the deconstruction phase. During the communist period only 4-year gymnasia existed (upper secondary general education) and all children aged 6 to 14 were educated in the comprehensive (common or single-structure) school (*jednotná základní škola*) comprising primary and lower secondary education. The basic single-structure school was established in 1948 after the communists came into power and replaced the existing school structure which had parallel and separate branches of study for pupils aged 11 to 14 years. The pre-communist system had been widely criticized already since the 1920s from the perspective of social justice and equality of educational opportunity.

Nevertheless, the main characteristic of socialist education in the basic school was a unified curriculum and progress through it in the same pace for all pupils, the emphasis being on sameness and mediocrity. After experiencing the single-structure school during 40 years of "real socialism" in Czechoslovakia, highly

educated parents and representatives of elites did not believe in the ability of this common single-structure school to respect individual students' different learning styles, interests, personal traits and other individual differences.

As a result of that disappointment with the single-structure (common) school they required the restoration of segregation at an early age, even though this was not in line with global educational perspectives and developments in western countries as they had developed from the 1950s with the quest for comprehensive schooling. The aim in establishing the multi-year *gymnázia* was to provide a more demanding education, facilitating further academic studies, for students as young as 11 who showed a higher level of cognitive capacity. The establishing of the multi-year *gymnázia* is thus the result of social pressure and the strongly articulated demand of more educated parents. (For more detailed discussion of the development of comprehensive schooling and the restoration of multi-year *gymnasia*, see Greger 2005).

Admission to six- and eight-year *gymnázia* programmes is based on selection consisting of various types of written and oral examinations designed by *gymnázia* teachers (normally in the mother tongue and mathematics), and, sometimes, intelligence or student aptitude tests provided by private companies. The decision concerning admission, on the basis of examination results as the main criterion, is taken by the *gymnázia* principal who is also a civil servant. The intake numbers are determined by the school administration (approximately 10% of the relevant age group) and range from 6 to 14% depending on the region. The national average in 2005/06 was 9.8%. The number of applicants for six- and eight-year *gymnázia* programmes is double the intake number.

The restoration of early selection during the compulsory education was widely criticized by researchers as well as pointed out by OECD experts. The government-promoted White Paper of 2001 reiterated that the two streams (selective *gymnázia* and the 2nd stage of basic school) of education should be gradually merged and that internal differentiation should take place within basic school. The inclusion of this recommendation in the new education bill, in the form of the gradual abolition of the lower years of six- and eight-year *gymnasia*, prompted public debate which was dominated by the requirement, on the part of parents with higher levels of education and socio-economic status, that a more demanding level of education be retained for their children.

The pressure exerted by the parents, *gymnázia* directors and teachers and academics in the media, not to mention their political influence, prevented the proposed reform and was one of the reasons the Bill was rejected by the Parliament as a whole in 2001. The new Education Act from 2004 at least introduced only one national curricular document for the two parallel types of lower secondary education – the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education - which is the foundation for the development of school educational programmes at both basic schools and at six- and eight-year *gymnázia*. Moreover, the number of teaching periods at basic school should gradually increase so as to be equal to *gymnázia* in quantitative terms and the levels of salaries of teachers at both types of school

have been made identical. However, the “*numerus clausus*” is preserved ($\pm 10\%$ of 11-year-olds) as well as the selective admission proceedings for six- and eight-year *gymnázia*, which discriminates against children with lower cultural capital – as the results of the PISA survey in the Czech Republic have revealed (see more in part 4.10. below).

The second newly established institutions to be mentioned here are the **tertiary professional schools**. The tertiary professional schools have been established since the 1992/93 school year as a completely new type of post-secondary education that did not exist in the past in the Czech Republic. They were implemented as an experiment from 1991 till 1995, when the amendment to the Education Act recognized them officially as a part of the regular education system. These schools were mainly founded as secondary vocational schools. However, later on many of them were transformed into (or some were newly founded as) legislatively independent institutions. Few of these schools managed to successfully transform themselves, after appropriate accreditation, into non-university types of higher education institutions offering bachelor degrees.

These schools contributed to the diversification of post-secondary education, even though they were (and to a large degree they are still) considered by the public as a “lower category” compared to higher education. After more than a decade of their official establishment, they are being more and more recognized by the labour market and by the general public as institutions fulfilling their purpose of developing and broadening the knowledge and skills of a student acquired during secondary education. They provide general and vocational education as well as vocational training for working in demanding occupations.

There were 174 tertiary professional schools in the Czech Republic (114 state schools, 48 private and 12 denominational schools) in the school year 2006/2007 offering programmes leading to the award of specialist diplomas in fields such as health services, agriculture, business, engineering and tourism. Access to tertiary professional school is open to all students that have graduated from upper secondary education by completing the school-leaving examination, the so-called *maturitní zkouška*. The length of studies for those in full-time attendance was unified by the new Education Act from 2004 to 3-year-long programmes, and for the medical programmes 3.5-years. Furthermore, following the new Education Act the Accreditation Commission that serves as a consultative body to the Ministry, was newly established to help in the process of approving educational programmes approvals (using a similar approval scheme to that applying to the approval of HE programmes).

The current development is leading to a convergence of professional technical schools and higher education institution of a non-university type. The White Book for Tertiary Education that is now being prepared suggests this trend. However, bearing in mind the large number of these schools, the authors suggest that those who will not transform into HE institution could become the centres of post-secondary (but not tertiary) further education playing an important role in their regions and complying with the demands of the local labour market.

To sum up: The re-creation of multi-year gymnázia represents a model example for the deconstruction phase, through its negating the past and restoring the 'status quo ante' trend. They were established in this early phase, without the knowledge of western trends and without elaborated argumentation. However, they demonstrate the fact that many rapid changes made in this deconstruction phase are hard to reverse afterwards. The example of professional tertiary schools teaches us that introducing a new institution into the system requires time before the public, and other institutions which are already a part of the system, come to accept it. This makes us aware of the fact that to introduce a new institution and to reach the planned goals represents a long-term process that has not, in the case of tertiary-professional schools in the Czech Republic, yet been achieved. The deeper structural reform at the primary, lower and upper secondary level was not planned. The largest changes made so far have briefly been described in this section.

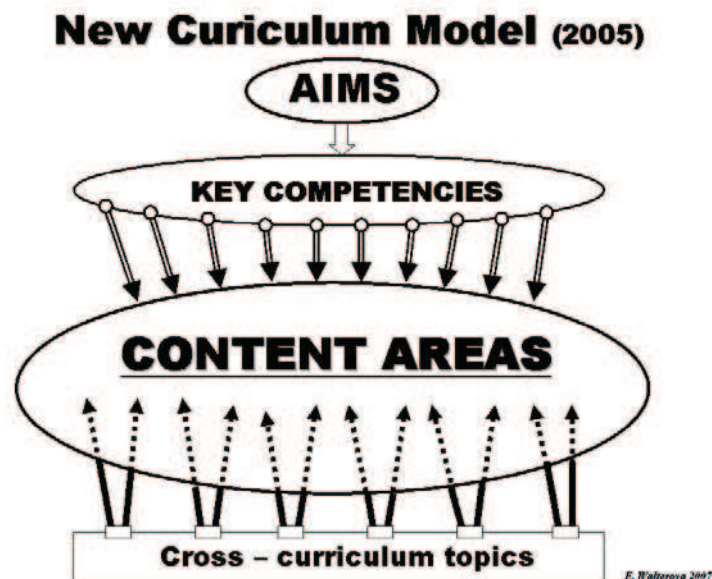
4.5. Curriculum Policy and Development

The traditional curricular model of Czech schools was founded on the transmission of cultural experiences, national values and patterns of behavior usual in the domestic social environment. Centrally developed time plans and uniform syllabi were implemented compulsorily in every school. Teachers mostly played the part of transmitters, while the implementation of the unified curriculum was controlled by the schools inspectorate. Only one set of textbooks for every subject was introduced for student use.

Changes in curriculum policy and development started in very early phase of the transformation process. First of all the expulsion of ideological distortion was achieved, while, a greater freedom of choice in teaching methods and textbooks, together with alternative approaches, have paved the way for a more relaxed attitude towards the curriculum and towards curricular school autonomy. In the mid 1990s the requirement of the State for education at basic and secondary schools was defined within a broader framework by **Educational Standards**. These were the main instruments of state curricular policy, setting out its requirements for the quality of education. The documents outlining educational standards for a relevant level of education consisted of a definition of achievement targets, providing a general outline of content and of the performance skills and outcomes the students should gain. Model programmes for schools were offered, eg. **General School, National School, Basic School**. Schools made modest adjustments to a selected model programme depending on their particular circumstances. For any alternative pedagogical approaches the approval of the state was demanded. An overwhelming majority of schools remained compatible with the traditional curricular model, not having taken into account changes in the educational environment and of the need for innovative teaching focused on the active personal development of students equipped with a set of universally applicable life skills necessary for the present and future. In spite of the changed content of traditional teaching subjects (i.e. a change in the way the previous curriculum model was constructed),

the curricular model drew criticism. The whole curriculum was overloaded, too encyclopedic and academic. The newly developed present curricular programmes apply a substantially changed model (see the illustration below), based on quite different principles to those of previous syllabi and teaching plans. New curricular programmes have been ready for implementation in basic education since the school year 2007/8, while programmes for secondary schools are in the phase of pilot verification.

Let's give a general outline of the new curriculum for basic education (2005). **Its aims are oriented towards the development of key competencies.** Particular attention is given to * strategies of learning and motivation towards lifelong education, to creative thinking and problem solving, to * communicative competencies in mother and foreign languages*, to the development of cooperative strategies and to respect for others. Attention is given to the * development of a free and responsible personality aware of its right and duties *, to emotional development and to positive attitudes, behavior and relations with other people, the environment and nature. * Stress is laid upon the active and responsible protection of physical, mental and social health, * support of tolerance, politeness towards other people, their cultures and values, and learning to live together. *The development of self-awareness, including awareness of one's own abilities and opportunities, the application of these abilities (together with knowledge and skills) in solving problems in one's own life and professional orientation, are important.



Education **content is organized into broader areas**, integrating traditional teaching subjects and giving orientation to human development and to actual life demands. These areas can be listed as follows: * Language and communication

(Czech language and literature, Foreign languages) * Mathematics and its applications * Information and communication technology * Human beings and their world (primary introduction) * People and society (History, Civics) * The Human and Natural Worlds (Physics, Chemistry, Natural Science, Geography) * Arts and Culture (Music, Fine Arts) * Human health (Health Education, Physical Education) * The world of work. Current problems in the present world are emphasised as cross-curricular topics binding content and supporting the development of key competencies. Six cross-curricular topics are stated: * Personal and social education * Education of a democratic citizen * Multicultural education * Environmental education * Media Studies * Education for coherent thinking in European and global dimensions.

A two-level participative curricular policy is now in use. Frame curricular programmes are developed on a national level. Every school prepares its own School educational programmes which are completed by student assessment programmes and evaluation instruments.

Undoubtedly, teachers are considered crucial implementors of the new curricular model. The implementation itself is a complicated and complex process changing curricula, school culture and teacher training. School in general is a specific culture reflecting changes slowly and understanding its mandate traditionally in terms of the passing on of knowledge from teacher to student. Written curricula can be changed by experts but real change depends on teachers. However teachers, the main actors in the change process, have not been appropriately prepared for new tasks.

Changes in curricular policy demand team working and the support of schools by social partners. Real educational change requires effort over time against the resistance of inertia in terms of current practices and ways of behaviour and thinking. Extensive learning from others and network building has been important, as well as internal changes to the school climate and organization, building an ethos supporting opportunities to learn for every pupil and student.

4.6. Evaluation and Monitoring of Education

The complex system of evaluation is a key area for the functioning of a decentralized education system. It includes evaluation at different levels – student assessment, evaluation of schools and evaluation of regions and the educational system as a whole. Especially in the transformation of education, the importance of evaluation gradually rose in importance. In the early years of the transformation process schools were granted a high degree of autonomy in a wide range of competencies, including curriculum determination. As the White Book approved in 2001 argues, “a higher degree of school autonomy, which means that a school is held responsible for its teaching, needs to be balanced by a systematic evaluation of achievements to ensure the quality and effectiveness of its work” (MoEYS 2001, p. 41). Until the White Book’s publication in 2001 no coherent system of evaluation and monitoring had been proposed, even though these issues had already been

discussed during the early years of transformation.

Following the political changes of 1989, many new forms of evaluation have been introduced. This is particularly the case with the concept of school **self-evaluation**. The 1995 amendment to the Education Act obliged all schools to produce and publish an annual report, which served as an internal evaluation document that was not only to be monitored by the educational authorities, but also was to be made available to parents and pupils. The same amendment obliged the Ministry of Education to compile an annual report on the whole education system and submit it to the Government. According to the new Education Act of 2004, annual reports were to be drawn up by the Ministry of Education (state level), by the regional authorities (local level) and by the head teachers of basic, secondary and tertiary professional schools (school level).

The self-evaluations of schools that are the basis for annual school reports are to be used by the **Czech school inspectorate** for their monitoring activities at schools. The Czech school inspectorate represents the traditional institution for external evaluation of schools in the Czech Republic. It has its roots in the 19th century Austrian education system, with its uniform system of state supervision over schools. However the School Inspectorate underwent fundamental changes in the early years of transformation, which reset its function and goals and particularly its working methods.

Another form of external assessment is represented by private institutions that offer external tests to schools on a commercial basis. These private companies are of growing importance and many schools use their services to be able to compare the results of their school with other schools. These companies responded to school demands for external evaluation, since the state did not supply this service and there was no national testing at any level of education.

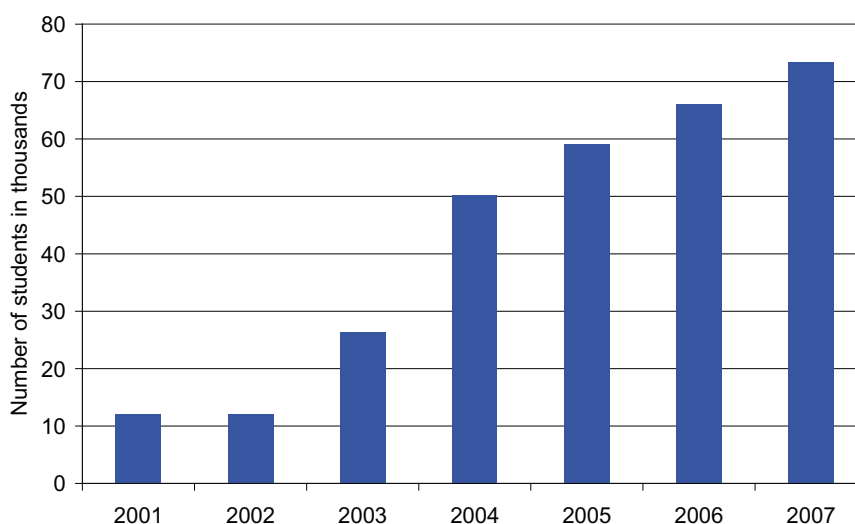
This has changed with the establishment of the **Centre for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements** (CERMAT), which from January 2006 became an organisational unit of the state (even though it was founded in 1999 as part of the Institute for Information on Education). It was made responsible for the preparation of reform of the **school-leaving examination at the end of upper secondary schooling**, the so-called "*maturitní zkouška*". The new leaving examination proposed in the White Book was also included in the new Education Act. The new leaving examination is legally required to consist of a general part and a so-called 'profile' part. The general part of a school leaving examination consists of three examinations: the Czech language, a foreign language and an optional subject chosen by the student (mathematics, civic education, natural and technical education or information-technology). Mathematics was included only as an optional, not obligatory subject for the leaving examination. This has been the subject of widespread discussion.

The 'profile' part of a school-leaving examination consists of three compulsory examinations, where the principals specify the selection of subjects of compulsory examinations in compliance with the Framework Educational Programme.

The new form of *maturitní zkouška* was to be introduced, according to the

Education Act, in 2008, but the new government has proposed an amendment that has passed through Parliament that postpones the start till 2010, arguing that it is not yet well prepared. However, the national tests prepared for the secondary school-leaving examination have been at the pilot stage for a long time, (since 2001) and schools could join these pilots on a voluntary basis. The next graph shows the participation of students in the pilots that reached its peak in 2007 when more than 70 000 students took part.

Figure 2. Number of students participating in pilot programme for secondary school leaving-examination (Maturita nanečisto)



Source: Chvál, 2007, p. 2

The Centre for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements has implemented another two important projects that are in line with a systemic complex evaluation system proposed in the White Book. This concerns the **external assessments of students in 5th and 9th grades** (at the end of primary and lower secondary education). These initiatives were put into practice as projects from 2004 till 2007 and were funded by European Structural Funds. The projects consisted of three tests: Mathematics, the Czech language and a student aptitude test supplemented by the a student questionnaire. Also these projects were open to interested schools on a voluntary basis, and in 2007 already almost 60,000 students in 5th and 9th grades were taking part. The idea of the authors of the White Book was that these projects could result in national examinations following confirmation of their full implementation. However these were proposals of the previous Social Democrat government in power. When the new government, led by the conservative Civic National Party, came to power, the plans went no further. This is another example of systemic reform being gradually implemented (so we have entered the implementation

phase) and then stopped after a change of government. Even though it is now unclear whether the new leaving examination from upper secondary schooling will be in place by the postponed date of 2010, some argue that it is just a way of putting a stop to a process that has been under preparation for more than 10 years. The introduction of national testing in the 5th and 9th grades, as well as the new form of leaving-examination with a new component of the nationally comparable results, also conflicts with the vested interests of the private agencies that provide external evaluation on a commercial basis. If the state supplies testing in this area it may well harm their business. However, both activities represent a change from an approach based on controlling the input of pupils and their achievements through entrance examinations to a more desirable approach stressing the control of outputs. This has been the main and as yet unrealised idea in debates since the early 90s.

4.7. School Autonomy

Changes in the statutes concerning schools, formerly state institutions, have been gradual. External school autonomy developed step-by-step from the early 1990`s until the Education Act (2004). The Act approved a whole complex of instruments for the autonomous functioning of schools as public institutions. The first changes started at once in 1990. The amendment to the School Law identified schools as public institutions, allowing for the establishment of private and denominational schools under state control. By the same law the pedagogical autonomy of teachers in choosing teaching methods and approaches was improved. Further changes concerned textbooks, which may be chosen by schools from the list approved by the Ministry of Education.

Rather broad competencies and responsibilities were given to principals who had the right to select school staff and to set the school budget on the basis of expenditure limits set by a general directive. In the mid-1990s a new amendment to the Law allowed for the establishment of school councils consisting of representatives of teachers, students, parents and local communities. Also schools were offered autonomy in a legal sense (juridical sovereignty). Strengthening school autonomy was a crucial counterpart to public discussion during the development of a strategy for national education policy in the Czech Republic (1998 - 2000) before the White Book was published (2001). Finding the balance between the freedoms and responsibilities of schools as open institutions diverted attention also to quality control, self-evaluation and the system of regular instruments implementing school autonomy. Some of them were put into practice through initiatives of individual schools, while others were made compulsory by the School Act (2004). The long-term Programme of School Development is a basic document for the management of school transformation, for developing school educational programmes, for staff development and internal evaluation of school quality. The programme has to be a criterion for external evaluation and school inspection. Principals are responsible for the programme, but it can't be developed without

staff participation. The school council, now a compulsory organ in every school, approves the programme. The Annual School Report, another instrument of school autonomy as a public document, informs all school partners about school results. The third basic instrument of school autonomy is a School Education Programme developed by teaching staff according to a common national framework. The development of school education programmes is part of curriculum reform (see above in part 4.5.). A substantial contribution to school autonomy has to come from self-evaluation. The development and implementation of its instruments are the most difficult problem to be solved by schools. It is expected that help from research and development institutions will be necessary.

In the Czech case, a gradual increase in school autonomy was initiated from below, particularly by alert schools and independent professional groups. Further development demanded legislative regulation. The present implementation process requires external support and a common infrastructure for the work of school teams and individual teachers, consulting and networking at all levels of the school change management.

4.8. The Teaching Profession and Educational Staff

The social status of teachers at the beginning of the 1990s was rather low. Correspondingly their salaries underestimated the complexity and burdens of this demanding profession. To improve the social status of the profession by increasing the level of teacher salaries was formulated as a main goal of educational policy in the 1990s. The effort to do so, joined with the process of shaping a stronger socio-professional group supported by teacher trade unions, teacher initiatives and newly-established teacher associations, was quite successful. During the 1990s teacher salaries gradually increased and nowadays are above the average salary in the public sector. Basic teacher salaries are determined by the state, but may be supplemented from an additional pot in the hands of principals. Teachers in Czech schools are not civil servants but public employees employed by schools. The prestige of the teaching profession, according to recent ratings, follows that of medical doctors, lawyers and other professions based on higher education qualifications.

Teachers are considered key actors in the process of change in schools, participating actively and directly in the process of educational reform, with increasing autonomy and personal responsibility which demands improvement in the professional qualities and competencies of educational staff. According the new Act on Education Staff (Act No. 563/2004) qualification demands, requirements and professional competencies are strongly defined by law for every category of educational staff at every level of schooling (ISCED 0-3). Obligatory general and specific preconditions for fulfilling responsibilities within educational professions are prescribed by the Act. The system of career progression, which is linked to salary progression, allows an individual career to advance according to a particular specialisation (function). The system introduces a number of diversified categories

for teachers, such as educational advisor, head of a methodological commission, or specialist in the development of school educational programmes. It continues with other categories of management staff, starting with school heads and defining the criteria for their qualifications. It is expected to motivate teachers and other educational staff to work on their professional and personal development and develop the quality of the whole school as well.

Prescribed qualifications are ensured by the system of initial teacher education and in-service training, which offers various educational tracks towards qualification. Recently the structure of teacher education has changed according to the Bologna Declaration. The integrative model of study has been replaced by a two-level (consecutive) one. Primary and secondary teachers have to reach Masters degree level in teacher training programmes of various fields. Bachelor study programmes are assigned to pre-school teachers, teachers of practical subjects and other educational professions. Initial teacher training is carried out by nine faculties of education and other relevant university faculties. The study programmes are carefully evaluated by the Accreditation Commission. A common standard has not existed in the past because of the need to respect the autonomy of higher education institutions. However, every teacher study programme respects a common framework created by sharing key components and credits with a generally acknowledged validity: they comprise a general university foundation, a pedagogical-psychological component, a subject specific component, a teaching-related (didactic) component and teaching practice. The pedagogical-psychological component is required for 20 - 25% of credits, while teaching practice should represent at least 10 - 12% of the time schedule. The specifics of teacher education, particularly the development of socio-personal qualities and professional abilities replacing a traditional academic orientation, has been permanently under discussion and is reflected in various innovations in teaching studies. The development of in-service training and teaching staff, and self-education during productive professional life, have been significant demands made during the transformation process. Difficulties in the 1990s, after the deconstruction of the previous centrally controlled system based on activities of central institutes and regional pedagogical centres, were linked to the rather slow building up of new infrastructure and a lack of properly prepared trainers. Independent initiatives and groups of innovative teachers, together with some university departments, partly filled the gap between the destroyed former system and the still inchoate formation of a new one. However these concerned only a small proportion of all teachers and schools.

The present broad development of in-service training, initiated by the new legislation, is based on a pluralistic and more flexible structure of institutions which receive direction from the commission of the Ministry accrediting the training programmes. Universities, teacher associations, schools and other agencies, including private ones, develop the programmes. Two Institutes (for general and for vocational education) of the MoEYS, together with the newly-established Institute for Pedagogical Staff Development, play a mostly supportive role in network building and human resources development. Universities, and particularly faculties

of education, are centres linked with additional and in-service training of newly defined categories of qualifications and of the professional careers of educational staff (e.g. head teachers, school managers, experts in teaching methods, pedagogical advisors). Teacher initiatives and schools organise mainly courses and workshops focused on teaching innovations and curricular-specific topics.

The growing number of students, teachers and other education staff participating in initial education and in-service training has increased demands on the provision of study in addition to the usual full-time studies. New forms of study include *distance* or *combined* study, and the recently introduced intensive *e-learning*. Extension of the network of distance education and e-learning study programmes broaden opportunities to access teacher qualifications and facilitate ways to improve qualifications without any interruption of employment. The new forms of studies are demanded also for more attentive perception of the particular and individual needs of students. Creating the conditions for a well-organized establishment needs technical and personal capacities, good quality study materials and learning support, new instruments for evaluation etc. New forms of studies are in progress in the Czech Republic where special projects are being introduced substantially supported by European Funds.

4.9. Support Structures

During the 1990s support structures in the educational sector were not a priority of educational policy and systematic attention to them was absent. Due to the liberal position of the state in this matter various providers attempted to implement a scale of supportive activities for schools without a common strategic framework or consistency. Among them the support provided by private companies and agencies addressed to individual schools or localities was the option that prevailed. Since the early 1990's high levels of support have come from abroad through various bilateral, regional, institutional or group forms of cooperation, eg. introducing new types of study programmes for school managers, delivering textbooks and lecturers for foreign languages teaching or developing evaluation instruments through independent groups or private agencies. Domestic initiatives serving to support the work of schools and teachers were fragmented at this time and dependent on various financial resources and the skills of different participants, producing inconsistent and unbalanced effects.

The absence of intentionally established support structures started to be evident in the mid-1990s, but the formation of a regular support mechanism started later when the role of stakeholders and social partners in education was stressed. Remarkable incentives emerged through the PHARE programme and its projects concerning the reconstruction of the educational system (PHARE RES), the reform of vocational education and training (PHARE VET), information system development (Access to Documents) and particularly through the project aimed at a pre-accession strategy for human resources development (Czech Education and Europe 1999). Functioning mechanisms and effective instruments for the support

structures should be multifaceted and created by public, private and NGO agents. At present on the national level institutions have been appointed to support the following areas:

- **Information system development:** The Institute for Information in Education (ÚIV) provides annual statistical surveys in the domestic school system, serves as a national office of 'Eurydice', provides information on school networks and the efficiency of the school system.
- **Curriculum development:** The Educational Research Institute (VÚP) develops curricular framework programmes for primary and secondary general education, monitors the implementation of the framework in pilot schools, gives a methodology of implementation and supports a network of information exchange and a discussion forum of schools on the web. The National Institute of Vocational Education (NÚOV) develops framework programmes for technical and vocational secondary education, monitors the network of vocational schools and provides research on the implementation of framework programmes in schools.
- **Human resources development by education:** The National Education Foundation (NVF) monitors the development of professional education and its relations with the labour market and supervises the programme of human resources development. The National Agency for European Educational Programmes (NAEP) is a centre for international services for schools and students and the office managing EU educational programmes and supporting the development of European school networks.
- **Evaluation and assessment:** National Centre for Educational Evaluation (CERMAT) develops assessment instruments and tests for secondary leaving examinations and intends to develop instruments for evaluation and selfevaluation of basic and secondary schools.
- **Work of teachers and professional development:** The network of in-service training institutions is supporting each teacher's professional career and the development of teaching staff (see 4. 8.) on the national level. The newly established Institute for the Training of Teaching Staff conducts the network of regional in-service centres. Among public institutions of higher education, faculties of education and faculties training teachers give particular support to innovating schools and engaged teachers by lecturing, organising courses and workshops, monitoring and reflecting innovations, and conducting action research. The conditions for this provision have not been the most suitable for budget limitation and permanent reorganization of the structure and content of development programmes supported by public resources. The situation is currently changing because of new resources from EU structural funds which give extra finance for projects and innovative programmes supporting teachers' professional development and school innovations. In this matter public institutions often compete successfully with private ones, giving more expert complex and systematic support than casually and hastily established agencies.

- **Bottom-up initiatives:** A quite new phenomenon in the support structures is the informal voluntary activities of educational associations, non-profit organizations, NGOs and civil groups striving to support and care for progressive changes in education. A major influence on innovation in schooling has been achieved by the Permanent Conference of Associations in Education (SKAV). The Conference, established in 1999, has had the status of independent legal body since 2003. The SKAV, besides the support of innovations in schools, mediates an information exchange and communication between educational initiative groups, NGOs, state administrative bodies and the general public. Priorities of the SKAV are the following: * to support freedom and diversity in education, * to support orientation of schooling towards a complex development of children's personalities, * to emphasise changes in the curriculum * and to independent initiatives on curriculum reform which link up with others. Round tables of educational policy, organized monthly by SKAV together with the Centre of Educational Policy, discuss current problems of schooling. Results of the debates are published on the web and in the journal *Učitel'ské listy*, issued by SKAV. Member associations conduct in-service training programmes and workshops for teachers and school teams, provide consultations, and support projects and fundraising for schools, private agencies and firms. Besides this the methodical literature, journals and model portfolios for schools have been developed by SKAV members.
- **Educational research:** A complicated process of updating scientific knowledge for the support of school changes and teachers' professional activities is expected. Educational sciences, psychology and sociology should be particularly engaged in the transfer of scientific knowledge into educational practice (White book 2004, p. 45). In the initial phase of transformation cooperation was blocked by distortion of the infrastructure and fragmentation of educational research. Special supportive conditions for educational research have not been created but newly established teams, mostly acting at universities and at faculties educating teachers, have developed numerous projects competing with other fields (disciplines) for grants. Since 1993 the newly established Czech Association of Educational Research (ČAPV) has informally directed theoretical and methodological shifts in educational research and their contribution to monitoring actual problems of education. Particular sections of annual conferences concern research on school education, the curriculum, teacher education and the teaching profession. At present, besides the national institutes serving the resort research of the Ministry of Education, departments, institutes and centres of Universities and faculties provide educational research based on various grants and projects supported by ESF, the Czech Grant Agency Research Programme and the Development Programme of the Ministry of Education. Some of them have profiled themselves by concentration on particular themes and problems, For example, the Institute of Educational

Research and Development (Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague) concentrates on the research into schooling and the teaching profession, while the Centre for Pedagogical Research (Faculty of Education, Masaryk University in Brno) focuses on the curriculum and research into the teaching process. The Institute of Educational Sciences (Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno) carries out research on social aspects and determinants of education, while the University Department of Education (Palacky University in Olomouc) deals with research on school and teacher education. Educational research, formerly under-financed and distorted, gradually has stabilized its infrastructure, improved its methodological basis and has profiled its concern by focusing on key problems of education.

4.10. Social Dimension

Last, but not least, among the dimensions of the educational transformation we must tackle the social dimension, the role of education in fostering social cohesion and combating social inequalities through education. To understand the change that has been achieved in this dimension we have to go back to the socialist era and characterize it briefly.

Between 1948 and 1989 the educational policy was built up in line with the official ideology of communist political elites that aimed to eliminate the mechanisms of social reproduction in education and that emphasized the possibility of upward mobility, especially for those coming from the lower social strata and enabling them to achieve higher levels of education. The goal to be achieved was equality of educational opportunity and this was widely understood in line with the concept of equality of results. The understanding of equity in that time is characterised by many authors as “statistical justice” (see e.g. Štech 2006), meaning that the main aim was to achieve the representation of different social classes at upper secondary and tertiary education at a ratio equivalent to their representation in society overall – i.e. a statistically equal representation of all classes.

For that purpose many other characteristics than just students’ ability were monitored in the process of admission to upper secondary and tertiary education (so called *kádrová kritéria*) – e.g. class origin and socio-economic status of the family, the political affiliation of the parents, rural/urban origin, or gender. The equality of educational opportunity was to be reached especially by proper selection and control of student intake at higher levels of education according to pre-set criteria (quota system). According to this practice of selection of students the educational system was perceived by communist officials as being by definition equal and just. Thus there was no need for research into educational inequalities. Even though the quota system has led to some positive results (e.g. equalizing the opportunity for achieving higher levels of education between women and men), Shavit and Blossfeld (1993), based on international data analysis, come to the conclusion that the impact of social origin on student attainment at higher levels of education was generally the same in former socialist countries and in capitalist countries.

The notion that “Communist positive discrimination” applied through the quota systems did not lead to significant results in reducing socio-economic inequalities in access to education is supported also by many other researchers (see e.g. Matějů 1993; Hanley 2001). Kreidl (2005) challenges this conclusion on a methodological as well as theoretical basis and shows by the data analysis that during periods of the most orthodox Communist egalitarianism in Czechoslovakia (1949-1953 and 1970-1973), socio-economic inequality in access to secondary and tertiary education did indeed decline.

The quota system was thus the main instrument for achieving equality of educational opportunity in the “real socialism era”, even though there is the disagreement on the effects of this policy.

The lack of the research data on educational inequalities in the Czech Republic could be seen as one of the relevant reasons why development in the social dimension has from our point of view been rather delayed compared to some other dimensions of transformation described above. According to J. Kotásek (2005b) the real reforms of the Czech educational system from a long-term perspective are only now being implemented, following their formulation in the White Book (2001) and their practical implementation and codification in the Education Act (2004). However, as we argue here, a formulation of deep systemic reform has not yet been achieved in this sphere.

After the political changes of 1989 the social dimension was not at the forefront of public debates and was not seen as urgent in comparison to the other areas and problems of education, e.g. de-monopolization of state education and opening room for freedom in school choice (resulting in the foundation of private schools and the restoration of early selection in multi-year *gymnázia*), de-ideologization and de-indoctrination of the content of education, and loosening of governance and control from the centre accompanied by the introduction of a broad level of school autonomy. In the early years of the transformation process the goal of achieving equal educational opportunities was thus mainly advocated by NGOs and active individuals.

It is the NGOs who have brought an agenda of equal educational opportunity to the forefront since the early 1990s and they started the actions (e.g. Roma teachers’ assistants) that were later implemented and supported by the state. The NGOs thus replaced the role of the state in the early years of transformation and they are still the engine of further progress. In the case of education for Roma children it is thus NGOs who run many of the progressive programmes (e.g. mentoring) and they influence policy formulation as well. The experts usually date the official (state) policy targeted towards Roma in October 1997 when the government adopted the so-called Bratinka Report on the Situation of the Roma Community. The most important measures oriented towards Roma inclusion were institutionalized and codified by the Education Act in 2004. Even though many programmes have been introduced since the 1990, and some new ones are being experimentally tested (e.g. community schools), we believe that there is still a lot of work to be done. We could instance the change in the goals of policies towards Roma that

stress integration and recognition and dissociate themselves from the policies of assimilation that were promoted during the socialist era. Stemming from this change of orientation towards integration and inclusion (that is also apparent in the case of mentally and physically disabled students and the support for their integration into mainstream schools), many actions and measures have already been implemented. However, the results of the first large piece of research on the situation of the Roma population in the Czech Republic were published in August 2006. This report identified the important challenges for the education of Roma children and analyzed some shortcomings of the programmes already up and running. It also promoted a large public debate in the media. The discussions mainly stressed the need for preparation of the long-term plan that would link interventions in educational policy with those in social policy. Even the foundation of a special institute is proposed. Thus with a critical eye we could say that in the case of the education of Roma we are somewhere on the way towards reconstruction and new complex policy formulation.

The leading role of NGOs is also apparent in the case of programmes targeted towards equal opportunity between women and men and in programmes for gifted students. A "Third sector" is an important actor in transformation, and in the policy formulation process.

The other important actor in the promotion of equality of educational opportunity to be analyzed here is represented by international and supranational organizations. In the Czech case two organizations need to be particularly stressed – EU and OECD.

The major impact of the EU is seen especially in legislative improvements in post-communist countries. The Czech Republic, among other countries, had to prepare new legislative documents especially with respect to disadvantaged groups (including national minorities, women, the disabled, etc.) and to combating discrimination. This was one of the criteria to be fulfilled for entering the EU on May 1st, 2004. These led, according to many authors (e.g. Davidová et al. 2005) and organizations, to a high quality of legislation in the 'New Member States' in the case of respect for minorities and disadvantaged groups that is in many respects better than the legislation of 'Old Member States'. Nevertheless the quality of legislation is not always translated into reality and practice in this area.

The EU also plays at present a very important role in fostering equity through the financial resources that come into the New Member States through European Social Funds. The programmes for disadvantaged groups and for combating educational inequalities are largely financed from these sources.

Another important actor to be mentioned here is the OECD. Activities of the OECD have contributed to educational change, especially through the analysis of the status of the education system. In the second half of the 1990s two country reviews of national policies for education (OECD 1996 and follow-up review ÚIV 1999) were developed. The presence of the OECD experts and their suggestions for the development of Czech education were very useful in this period of the search for an appropriate long-term plan and policy formulation. These reviews

pointed out (among many other things) the selective nature of education and recommended abolition of the newly re-constructed selective multi-year gymnasia. More generally, through the whole review the OECD stresses the importance of the equity perspective for policy analysis.

The discussion on equity in the Czech Republic was even more encouraged by the results of the OECD research project PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*), conducted in 2000, 2003 and 2006. The analysis of the data mainly from PISA, but partly as well from other international studies of student achievement (e.g. TIMSS, IALS, PIRLS – for the whole participation of the Czech Republic in these studies and wider discussion of the results see Straková 2003) revealed that the selective entrance examination to multi-year *gymnázia* at the age of 11 disfavors children with lower cultural capital. Thus students from the two lowest quintiles of SES made up only 15% of student population at these selective schools. The existence of the multi-year *gymnázia* largely contributes to a reproduction of educational inequalities (Matějů, Straková 2005).

The analyses of the data show that the Czech Republic belongs to the countries where the impact of family background on student performance is very high and also where the differences between schools are above the OECD average (the differences in results between schools are 1,5time larger than the OECD average). What is more, the schools largely differ in their socio-economic background. The school's socio-economic background explains 37% of the variance in the students' test results. This is the 7th highest value among the countries involved in the 2003 PISA study).

The selective nature of the Czech education system and the existence of multi-year gymnasia is widely criticized by the researchers and quite recently all political parties in the Czech Republic have also recognized it as a problem. This is a recent development that was made possible by the data evidence. We should keep in mind that the Czech Republic does not have national testing and thus the international data are the most reliable and representative data on student achievement. Nevertheless, there is a lack of political will to change the selective nature of education because, as the political parties repeatedly explain it, the "general public wants to retain these selective schools" (see part 4.4. above).

We could sum up that the social dimension was stressed mainly by the NGOs and the international organizations and their international benchmarking activities. The development in this area led to a gradually rising understanding of educational inequalities and some initiatives have already been implemented at state level. The importance of equity and staff participation. The school council, now a compulsory organ in every school, approves the programme. The Annual School Report, another instrument of school autonomy as a public document, informs all school partners about school results. The third basic instrument of school autonomy is a School Education Programme developed by teaching staff according to a common national framework. The development of school education programmes is part of curriculum reform (see above in part 4.5.). A substantial contribution to school autonomy has to come from self-evaluation. The development and implementation

of its instruments are the most difficult problem to be solved by schools. It is expected that help from research and development institutions will be necessary.

In the Czech case, a gradual increase in school autonomy was initiated from below, particularly by alert schools and independent professional groups. Further development demanded legislative regulation. The present implementation process requires external support and a common infrastructure for the work of school teams and individual teachers, consulting and networking at all levels of the school change management. The understanding that only through equity can we achieve a high quality of education is widely shared among the policy makers and researchers. This was made possible by the research evidence. However, although at the macro level it might seem that the important changes have been achieved, they have not been so well translated into concrete measures and school-level initiatives. Educational inequalities in the Czech Republic are one of the largest according to international comparisons. Even though the change started as a bottom-up process initiated by NGOs and active teachers, later on with the help and support of international organizations (EU, OECD), we need again to return to school level to achieve a real change that would lead to an equalizing of educational opportunities. The social dimension issue, according to our point of view, has not reached the level of systemic reform, but the new formulation of the complex system of combating educational inequalities should be drawn up, based on an analysis of the current state of affairs.

5. Key Problems and Perspectives

The Czech case, as stated above, provides evidence demonstrating in general the theoretical framework of the transition process, from the phases of deconstruction and reconstruction to partial stabilization and modernization. Concerning the phase of systemic reform, there is only a potential plan, a vision, a strategic framework sketched already in the White Book at the beginning of the new century. The process of building the new system has been much more complicated due to the unbalanced, diffuse, unstable and poorly controlled changes in the social and political environment. It has been lacking in experience, clear value preferences and a regular control mechanism. Multidimensional changes and the different interests of social groups and actors have brought new unexpected problems and have provided a real challenge to the capacity of those involved in education striving to build a functioning system. Lack of coordination of decisions at various levels and permanent „improvement“ of a decomposed system accompanied by the strong criticism of powerful groups of the public have been counter-productive. It has caused retardation of the transformation process, induced partial destruction of it, slowed down a performance of a real systemic reform and weakened the ability to act of effective actors and groups who have conducted a number of successful changes and have implemented partial reform measures. Education, in spite of its traditionally appreciated status, is neither a preferred value nor a real political priority in present Czech society. Economic support of education has not reached

the necessary planned 6% of GDP yet. The political discourse on educational reform has been prevailingly led by the partial aims and interests of political parties and social groups who have not sought a consensus. The social status of teachers has improved but real social support for this professional group has been rather weak and the criticism of schooling has been aimed often toward them without any broader social discourse on education. Numerous positive changes on the macro-level to the educational system have not reached down to the middle- and micro- level due to insufficient communication and cooperation, including lack of a suitable administration and implementation mechanism and instruments. On the other hand, positive changes and challenges on lower levels have not encountered sympathy, been made use of or given direction at the higher levels of decision-making. A wrong interpretation of curricular reform, and partly also media simplification, have built barriers to understanding the substance of it.

Special attention should be given to the European dimension of the Czech education and to the common strategies of the European Union on education. The expected, but as yet unrealised, systemic reform of the national school system depends on the creation of approaches helping to utilize European support, e. g. applications to European Structural Funds, and on finding appropriate ways of adopting a common framework to respond to national needs and conditions.

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