Developing of Cultural Citizens in the Context of the Reform of Educational Curriculum in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

The mono-cultural trends of 'traditional' Czech educational system have been a potential reason for a possible clash/tension of cultural and civic identities of the culturally heterogeneous society. European membership is a challenge for educational institutions in the Czech Republic. The reform can be understood as a reaction towards the challenge. Two years impact of the Reform on schools in the North-Moravia and Silesia Region is analysed at selected schools.

The Czech Republic is becoming a heterogeneous society of indigenous inhabitants, minorities and ethno-cultural groups of newcomers. Mono-cultural trends of "traditional" Czech educational system have formed a potential reason for a possible clash/tension of cultural and civic identities. European membership was a challenge for educational institutions in the Czech Republic which led in the Reform of Curriculum at Primary and Secondary schools and its two levels: Framework Educational Programmes (or Framework Curricula) and School Educational Programmes (or School Curricula. The reform has been created as a means for developing of pupils' identities according to their individual needs and requests including the acceptance of their ethno-cultural backgrounds (intercultural competencies).

The article deals with the two years' impact of the Reform on elementary schools with focus on the debate about multicultural education. The text is based on primary and secondary (Borkovcová et al. 2008) data. The original research was conducted in several selected schools in North-Moravia and Silesia Region (interviews with teachers in service, textual analysis).

Framework Educational Programmes

In 2004 the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports approved new curricular policy principles for pupils and students from 3 to 19 years of age into the Czech education system. The step was based on the National Education Development Programme for the Czech Republic ("White Book") and enshrined in the Education Act (on Pre-school, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education). Since 1st September 2007 first and sixth classes of basic schools have begun to teach within the new policy that is based on prepared curricular documents.

> Curricular documents are developed at two levels: the national level and the school level. The national level in the curricular documents system comprises the National Education Programme and framework education programmes (FEPs). The National Education Programme defines initial education as a

whole. The framework education programmes define binding educational norms across various stages: pre-school education, basic education and secondary education. The school level consists of school education programmes (SEPs), forming the basis of education at the individual schools. School Education Programmes are developed by individual schools themselves, based on principles set out in the appropriate framework education programme. As a tool, the schools can use the Manual for Developing School Education Programmes ("the Manual"), which exists for each framework education programme. The Manual contains instructions for the preparation of school education programmes as a whole, procedures for developing the various components of the school education programme, and specific examples (FEP BE, 2007, p 9).

The reform has meant a great change, above all for older generation of teachers. In the former educational system (especially in the period before Velvet Revolution in 1989), teachers had to keep the national curriculum (official textbooks and so on) and on the other hand they were not supposed to prepare own school educational plans. The regime was not opened to free improvisation of ideas on the didactic field. The organisation of system was embedded in from-up-to-down logic (overwhelming power of ministry, no school autonomy).

In the late 1990s the debate about the need of educational reform introduced a new option – to give more free space, 'free hands' to teachers activities, not to tie them with direct imperatives of national curriculum but rather to outline certain frameworks about contemporary content of what should be taught in modern school.

Innovations brought new challenges and practical difficulties to teachers. The problem can be divided in several categories with the description of conditional factors. Kratochvílová (2007) identifies the difficulties of the teacher as 'a designer' of the school curriculum who had been only 'a user' and 'a mediator' before. The new role of designers (creators) of the school curriculum raises question of how were they successful in preparation of and adaptation to the reform.

First, the teachers of basic schools face unfamiliarity with theoretical terminology and the lack of its use at schools. The factor causes the problem of understanding the reform. Many experienced teachers use didactical methods and forms of communications which are up-to-date to contemporary pedagogical sciences (e. g. project-based learning, co-operative learning). They use to say: 'We do it like this, we work like this but we can not give a correct name to it' (Kratochvílová, 2007, p 103). Theory is separated from work experience and profession which describes a general view of students that they have to deal with theories just to satisfy demands of university teachers. There is a misunderstanding of the fact that a proper theory is well grounded and verified practice (*similarly* Ezzy, 2002, p 4 - as empirically verified constructs). Analysis of school documents shows that certain teachers have difficulties with concretisation and generalisation – with transformation of concrete examples to general level and vice versa (e. g. listing and naming the output of lessons in very general level).

The second difficulty hangs together with the first one. The ambivalence and inaccuracy of theoretical understanding, they both have a direct impact on the understanding terms and concepts teachers describe processes and events in their School Education Programmes with. Vague and fuzzy ideas may be found e. g. in concepts of competencies, organisational forms of work, evaluation, teaching strategies and so forth (Kratochvílová, 2007). Factors, that have influence on this 'state of the art', are saturated by the adherence to *status quo* and tradition, the lack of acceptance of innovation, and of self-developing activities (continuing education). The other question raises the problem whether teachers have condition and inner motivation to do it (to keep the word: 'You've got to live and learn').

Third, scepticism about effectiveness and purpose of the *continuing education* of teachers (the training for the purpose of reform) is connected to the previous question of inner motivation and attitudes. Průcha (2002) argues that challenges oriented towards teachers are not based on the well grounded knowledge about their professional preparedness, the condition for realisation, and in the first place about their attitudes towards recent requests. Scholars have inquired these questions lately. Beran, Mareš, Ježek (2007, p 127-128) introduce the results of their empirical research as follows: The attitudes of teachers are sceptical about the reform, the threat that it will be accepted and realised "just formally" is real and high. No critical analysis of educational system was undertaken that would lead to public debate and initiate the process of 'change of mind' in the group of rather conservative pedagogues. Without the high-quality continuing education the realisation of the reform is impossible and even it may be problematic to keep the contemporary value of state of affairs.

Multicultural education

In the second section we focus on the parts of the new curricula that are thematically linked to multicultural education. *The Framework Education Programme for Basic Education* (FEP BE) consists of two levels: nine *educational areas* (e. g. Humans and their world) and six *cross-curricular subjects* (e. g. multicultural education) that intersect the educational areas. Each educational area comprises one or more interlinked *educational fields*:

> Language and Communication through Language (*Czech language and Literature, Foreign Language*)
> Mathematics and its Applications *(Mathematics and its Applications)*
> Information and Communication Technologies (*Information and Communication Technologies*)
> Humans and their World (*Humans and their World*)
> Humans and Society (*History, Civic education*)
> Humans and Nature (*Physics, Chemistry, Nature, Geography*)
> Arts and Culture (*Music, Fine Art*)
> Humans and Health (*Health Education, Physical Education*)
> Humans and the World of Work *(The World of Work)* (FEP BE, 2007, p 16)

Each educational area (EA) contains an introductory description of the content and aims of the educational area**.** On the grounds of it, pupils are guided to by the educational

content so as to gradually acquire the key competencies. As we can see by the list, educational areas come to some extent from paradigms of the classical branches of science (behind "the modern names" it is possible to identify former school subjects). On the other hand, cross-curricular subjects are related to contemporary issues and represent an important and inseparable part of basic education (a mandatory part of basic education). They represent an important formative element of basic education, offering pupils the opportunity for individual engagement and teamwork and promotes their personal development, primarily as concerns attitudes and values (FEP BE, 2007, p 91).

Cross-curricular subjects:
- Personal and Social Education
- Democratic Citizenship
- Thinking within European and Global Contexts
- Multicultural Education
- Environmental Education
- Media Education

Authors of the text state that 'the cross-curricular subject's thematic areas cover multiple educational areas and allow for the integration of content from the educational fields' (FEP BE, 2007, p 91). The fact that these two levels intersect or overlap brings to pupils' comprehensive education and positively influences the formation and development of their key competencies. Pupils are thus given the opportunity to form an integrated view on a given issue and to apply a broad spectrum of their skills as they may view it from several perspectives and adopt the knowledge in more ways, and get better orientation.

The deeper look in a structure of the FEP BE shows we can see several educational areas and cross-curricular subjects that may embrace multicultural (education) issue – it is only present in the cross curricular subject called multicultural education. Let's briefly analyse the appearance, the context in which represented, and the content of multicultural education in the FEP BE.

The place that is not supposed to mention the multicultural issues was identified in the sixth EA named Humans and Nature (5.6) in the educational field of Geography (5.6.4). In listing the expected outcomes of The Social and Economic Environment that deals with a world population and globalisation (as a subject matter, not as a concept for pupils), the end of the first item argues that 'pupils will at the appropriate level, assess the spatial organization, distribution, structure, growth, movement and growth dynamics of the world population and, using selected examples, appraise the mosaic of the multicultural world' (FEP BE, 2007, p 62). The item and the subject matter of this part is based on a presumption that by knowing the world better pupils gain more multicultural awareness (we will compare it with teacher's attitudes later).

The connection between democracy and multiculturalism is more expected. In cross-curricular subject Democratic Citizenship (6.2.) the author state that its characteristics is of an interdisciplinary and multicultural character.

Generally speaking, it represents a synthesis of the values of justice, tolerance and responsibility, while more specifically helping to develop critical thinking,

an awareness of one's rights and responsibilities and an understanding of the democratic social order and democratic approaches to problem solving and conflict resolution. (p 93)

Finally, the text introduces the multicultural education itself. On a general level, cross-curricular subject Multicultural Education 'helps pupils know their own cultural anchorage and to understand different cultures' (FEP BE, 2007, p 99). It is aimed at building up a sense for justice, solidarity and tolerance, and guides pupils towards understanding and respecting the constantly increasing level of socio-cultural diversity. The Multicultural Education spreads all over the educational areas. We can find its effects and premises particularly in the educational areas of Language and Communication through Language, Humans and Society, Information and Communication Technologies, Arts and Culture and Humans and Health (and we've discussed geographical part of the Human and Nature).

A part worthy of our attention is situated in last sentences of the broad definition of ME. 'Its ties to all these areas result primarily from themes focused on the relationship between various nations and ethnic groups' (FEP BE, 2007, p 99). What does this statement say to readers? With all the respect to authors, it seems that multicultural issues focus on inter-ethnic (and religious ones get mentioned a few times) relations only. On that account, a critical reader can claim that the authors consider the multiculturalism to be free of concepts of gender studies, queer studies, disable studies, deaf studies, class studies, and youth studies. Or is it too early for the children between 12-15 years of age to make them know and understand that we live in a world of diverse sexual, health, class, and subcultural (etc.) identities?

An example from pre-primary education show that to express and to explain different identities is possible even among much younger children. In persona dolls method the activity consist of teacher's storytelling with "Persona Dolls" (special dolls with characteristic personal traits, names and stories) which is one of effective strategies for developing empathy with differences and critical thinking about prejudice and discrimination. The creators of the technique prepared different multicultural types of children (not only dolls with various physical features describing ethnic differences but e. g. a child on a wheelchair). So, international pre-primary and primary education knows and uses wider notion of multiculturalism.

The audience can object to saying everyone is a general after the battle" (English: "Hindsight is 20-20) but not to forget – we try to identify sources or factors of difficulties within the reform realisation, so critical view is necessary. The notion of multicultural issues (-ism and education) is narrowed. If there is some reference to other than ethnic and religious groups, it is made on very general level (example: list of benefits of ME):

> Benefits of the cross-curricular subject for pupils' personal development
> *In the area of knowledge, skills and abilities, the cross-curricular subject:*
> - offers pupils basic information on various ethnic and cultural groups living in Europe and the Czech Republic
> - develops the ability to orient oneself in a pluralistic society and to use intercultural contacts to enrich oneself and others

- teaches pupils to communicate and co-exist in a group containing members of different sociocultural groups, to exercise their rights and respect those of others, to understand and tolerate others' different interests, opinions and abilities
- teaches acceptance of others as individuals with the same rights, realizing that all ethnic groups and all cultures are equal and none is superior to any other
- develops the ability to recognize and tolerate the differences of other national, ethnic, religious and social groups and to work with members of different sociocultural groups
- develops the ability to recognize expressions of racial hatred and helps to prevent xenophobia
- teaches pupils to be aware of the possible impacts of their verbal and non-verbal statements and to be prepared to take responsibility for their actions
- provides information on basic multicultural terminology: culture, ethnic group, identity, discrimination, xenophobia, racism, nationality, intolerance etc. (FEP BE, 2007, p 99)

After brief insight to the source document of curricular reform, with references to its strong points and weaknesses in the realm of ME, we turn our attention to problems of ME from the point of view of ME projects' managers. As a consequence of FEP BE, many teachers joined ME training courses to develop their knowledge, skills and competences. Project managers and trainers were asked in a recent research (Borkovcová et al. 2008) what kind of difficulties they have to face during the training of multicultural education.

First, they reveal the occurrence of negative and sceptical attitudes towards ME and the lack of will for change. Second, the teachers seem to have the lack of intercultural experiences and knowledge about multicultural issues. Third, the lack of motivation and interest in continuing education repeats. Fourth, a realisation of ME projects (not only for teachers, for pupils too) at schools depends on a positive approach of principals and school staff. Finally, we are back at the same problem from the first part – the key element seems to be the general lack of volition to fulfil and complete the reform. Anyway, those who taught well teach well, but those who did not still do not know why and how to change it...

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