
STUDENT WRITING

TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL POLITICS IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND POLAND

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Abstract: *Fundamental change in education is one of the most important tasks in the process of transformation to an economically developed and democratically organised society. In this paper we study the real effect of transformation in the educational systems in the Czech Republic and Poland. The core of this transformation follows from actions led by the educational politics of these countries, their intentional - whether, rational or irrational - influence on the developmental process.*

Key words: *the Czech Republic, Poland, educational system, educational politics, transformation, curriculum, curricular reform*

1. Situational Base of the Comparison

"Many people believe that the prosperity of any country largely depends on its political and educational system. There is not much exaggeration in such an idea. Many people in Poland would also say that during socialism the educational system, compared to the political system, was not that bad. What education do we have now? How does it work now in the new social, political and economic environment, created by a market economy?" Those are questions formulated by Ireneusz Bialecki, the editor of the background report for the OECD review - *Education in a Changing Society* (1995). The common basis of both countries, the Czech Republic and Poland, is the relic of the previous communist regime. While clarifying difficulties which the reforms in these countries still meet (and will meet in future) this factor can be considered the most significant.

"A wide range of aspects of this heritage can be identified, most of them of a sociological nature and falling under the heading of inertia of acquired attitudes and behaviour patterns. (...) In general, it is estimated that the innovative sector is only a small minority, perhaps 15 to 20 per cent of the population. (...) "the authors of the background report for the OECD review, this time for the Czech Republic (1996), say. "It is necessary to realize that the sociological forces and resistance require, almost by definition, a long time to be attenuated and they can only lose their impact very gradually." These quotations refer separately to situations in

different countries. Nevertheless they correspond symptomatically and together they make a logical statement describing the same transformational process.

Since the political takeover in 1989, the society and economy of both countries have gone through complicated structural changes. Those changes consequently require deviation from the centralised model of education and create an expectation of fundamental change in educational policy. The changing nature of society, the new social structures and the dynamic quality of the economy influence the educational and qualification demands of the labour market. This has an impact on the structure of education and on the role of education in society. Investment in education is beginning to prove its worth economically through greater working efficiency and competitiveness. The one goal of both educational systems is to face the demands which the new knowledge society requires.

After 1989, connected with the economic and social development which was to restore an economy broken by decades of communist supremacy, a natural need for long-term planning appeared. „The end of the post-revolutionary decade leaves in its wake the idea that education, in a democratic society with a market economy, develops absolutely spontaneously, depending only on the current economic progress of the country and on the currently existing will of political representatives” (Kotásek 2000). There is no doubt that education can not develop progressively without consistent planning and evaluation of changes. Unlike an economy, education cannot be improved by shock therapy. Investment in education will show itself retrospectively after a longer period. The effects, though, are permanent and have a long-standing impact on society.

Obviously, both countries have found the same roots of change in the totally changed political and economic situation in the 1990s. They also have the same short-term and long-term goals of development. It is clear that the typical characteristics of educational systems are an extremely high level of inertia and an unusual resistance towards change. Their transformation therefore requires an enormous effort and political resolve. As we will show later on, both countries decided for similar reform strategies. Compared to the Czech Republic, Poland shows a faster rate of implementation of changes. Taking on board the Polish approach seems to provide a unique opportunity especially for the Czech Republic which aims for a qualitative change in its education in a very similar context.

In this paper, we study the real impact of the educational policy of the chosen countries on education. We show the necessity of the implementation of educational politics in terms of priorities for all of society. The effects of educational policy are indicated by qualitative analysis of both the current and the previous condition of education. This means focusing on the real changes put into practice in organisations and in the teaching process. As a tool of educational policy we consider the strategy programs of national educational development. These documents are usually processed by the Ministries of Education and introduced for public consultation and to be accepted by the government and parliament. School policy is then implemented through school legislation and appropriate bodies with the powers to do so. We will examine those in particular in what follows.

2. Current Educational Systems (Field of Compulsory Education) Viewed as the Effects of Educational Politics

The very first glance at their respective educational systems reveals a fundamental difference between the two countries. That is the duration of compulsory education. While school attendance in the Czech Republic is compulsory for nine years, Polish compulsory education lasts ten years! Poland prolonged compulsory education in 2004 by introducing "year zero". Six-year-old children are obligated to attend a preparation class for primary education at a pre-school (*przedskole*) or at a pre-school-class of a primary school. The age for beginning compulsory school attendance is now the same as in the Czech Republic. The education of six-year-old children is stressed as the consequence of an effort to equalise educational opportunities through reducing the influence of social factors on an academic failure. This step seems to be logical, as we know that pre-schools contribute to raising the social and cultural development of children and they form basic conditions for children's future education. This step was taken also as a reaction to the course of Polish pre-school education at the beginning of the 1990s: unemployment in Poland increased as a result of economic reforms and therefore the period during which parents could stay home taking care of a baby, receiving financial support from the state, was prolonged. However, this regulation led to a decrease in pre-school attendance and consequently this was reflected by a decrease in the number of pre-schools, especially in rural areas. It showed that those children who did not attend any pre-school were less successful later during their school attendance, with a variety of negative impacts on their future education.

In the Czech Republic, on the other hand, pre-school attendance is not compulsory. The state only supports improving the uneven development of children before primary education and offers early care for children with special needs through legal regulations. According to the law, children who are at preschool age have to be accepted into kindergartens. Furthermore, there is a possibility of establishing preliminary classes at primary schools for preschoolers who are socially disadvantaged. The Czech Republic then only creates possibilities for equal chances in primary education, while Poland in this case resolutely pushes ahead its educational politics in order to consistently equalise the educational opportunity of pupils.

Another feature that distinguishes both educational systems is the compulsory school education trajectory through primary and lower secondary level. As we mentioned above, Polish compulsory education includes the zero grade for all pupils, six years of primary school (*szkola podstawowa*) and three years of lower secondary school (*gymnazjum*). Compulsory education in Poland is thus outlined in three main phases. The education of six-year-old children covers stimulation of their general development and teaches them basic skills in reading and math. The following six years aim to develop children's powers of self-expression, reading and writing, the ability to solve arithmetic problems, to use simple tools, to develop

habits of social life, develop cognitive abilities and aesthetic and moral sensitivity. This period is divided into two stages. Teaching at Stage 1 (grade 1 to 3) is integrated, Stage 2 (grade 4 to 6) is arranged according to subjects and it also includes cross-curriculum topics. Finally, the aim of *gymnazjum* (compulsory secondary education) is to introduce the pupils to the world of science by means of teaching languages, concepts, theories and methodological characteristics of given disciplines. For the comparison with the Czech Republic, it is important that this Stage 3 is attended by all children without any exceptions.

Czech children start their compulsory school attendance at primary school (*základní škola*) which splits into five years at the First level and four years at the Second level. Those pupils whose parents apply for *víceleté gymnázium* (multi-year gymnasia) and who pass the entrance examination can finish their compulsory education there starting from grade 6 or 8 (see below). The aim of the First level is to create conditions for lifelong learning. This means acquiring basic habits and skills, motivating children to learn and to gain basic literacy as a tool for further successful education. The main aim of the Second level of primary education is to give the pupils the best fundamentals of a general education. However, *víceleté gymnázium* in the Czech Republic traditionally and purposefully prepares only talented students, mainly for continuing studies at the university. Compared to *základní škola*, the role of *víceleté gymnázium* is one of social exclusivity. It gives preferential treatment to a limited part of the population and guarantees an easier way of studying in the upper secondary and tertiary sphere. This reduplication at the lower secondary (compulsory) level of education thus introduced selectivity into the Czech education system. This early selectivity (about 10% of pupils go to *víceleté gymnázium* when they are eleven years old) is a source of constant criticism on the grounds that selection is based on the economic and cultural status of the child's family rather than the real intellectual abilities of the child. Nevertheless, the new Education Act from 2004 reconfirmed *víceleté gymnázium* in spite of recommendations formulated in the *National Program for the Development of Education*: „To coherently reduce programs of *víceleté gymnázium*. To confirm this arrangement in legislation and to consider it as one of the main changes to the whole education system.“ On the other hand, entering compulsory secondary education in Poland is not a selective process. There is only one requirement for acceptance: finishing primary school with a final report.

If we introduce this comparative analysis by looking at the initial phase of school attendance, the third important parameter of compulsory education in the compared countries seems to be the possibility of moving on to higher secondary education. In the Czech Republic, the criteria for achieving the sphere of post-obligatory education are the outcomes from *základní škola* (expressed by Final report and Final certificate) and the results of an entrance examination (if there is one). The pupils take the entrance exam at the school they apply to. The form and content of the examination are set by the head teacher of the particular upper secondary school. In Poland, the number of points from an external standardised examination taken at the end of the grade 3 of the *gymnazjum* (the end of compulsory

education), and the points received during the *gymnazjum* examination (based on results achieved in chosen areas of study and other achievements), determine the pupils' admission to an upper secondary school. The admission rules are defined by educational activities which become the basis for the calculation of points, determining rules for the calculation of points and for the minimum numbers of points to be gathered in chosen study areas and for additional achievements. The obvious contrast between both systems is that there exists a standardised tool to evaluate admission to the post-obligatory sphere of education in Poland and that is the final examination. However, the debates about a centralized evaluation of pupils' results at the end of grade 9 which would be acceptable to secondary upper schools in the Czech Republic are endless.

The efficiency of the educational systems described above can be seen for example on PISA, the international assessment of the results of 15-year-old pupils shown on following table:

Table 1. National average scores in PISA 2003 tests for Poland and the Czech Republic

Year	2003		
	PL	CZ	difference
Reading literacy	496	489	-7
Scientific literacy	497	523	26
Mathematics	490	516	26
Solving problems	487	516	29

Source: Database of OECD PISA, www.pisa.oecd.org

3. On the Way to Change: The Tools of Educational Policy

There is no doubt that the main elements in the process of transformation have already been implemented in both countries. Remarkable success can be seen in the transformation from close and uniform systems to open and plural ones, in the depoliticalization of education, the breaking of the state monopoly and, decentralisation in managing the system of education. Powerful changes in the early 1990s eliminated ideological distortion and a false historical view from the state-controlled curriculum. They restored religious education. The status of the Russian language was changed and new foreign languages were introduced into the curriculum. Responsibility for the administration of education was divided between the ministry and regional and local government. The possibility for private subjects and institutions to access education was established. These changes facilitated innovative development. They were fully successful in a very short time and they are evident to this day. No further reform has brought such considerable progress or such noticeable effects.

Yet education reform in the Czech Republic did not keep up such progress for a long time. It lacked an explicit conceptual foundation – an integrated educational

policy. One of the negative aspects was the continuing absence of an efficient statutory norm. The School Act of 1984 was not completely replaced until 2005! It had been repeatedly amended and the consequence of this situation was the loss of transparency, logical cohesion and overall strategy. The most important legislative changes in the field of compulsory education (for the needs of this paper) were the introduction of compulsory school attendance for nine years and the introduction of *víceleté gymnázium* in 1990.

A new Education Act in Poland was adopted in November 1991 as the result of a debate about national educational goals. The principle of an individual pupil's development was identified as a priority. The Act did not introduce any fundamental changes in the structure of the educational system or the curriculum; on the other hand it facilitated some formal moves to empower civil and local initiatives to determine school life. The Act about the Implementation of the Reform of Educational System, January 1999 was a significant change. Structural modifications were made to the education system, including the introduction of the *gymnazjum* as a brand new type of school which was the most visible change and became a symbol of the whole reform. It was decided that the previous structure of education (eight years of primary school connected to four years of high school or three years of vocational school) would be replaced by the „6+3+3” system. This means that primary education was reduced to six years and pupils continued at a three-year *gymnazjum*. *Gymnazjum* followed by three years of upper secondary education at a specialised lyceum or by two years at a basic vocational school.

The different conceptions of the structures of educational systems in both countries are obvious. In Poland, they de facto united the sphere of compulsory education: a pupil makes a decision regarding continuing education after an appraisal made at the age of 16. What is more, the phase of *gymnazjum* study is accessible to all pupils. In the Czech Republic, the structure of compulsory education was broken up by introducing *víceleté gymnázium* in 1990.

Yet there were also doubts regarding structural reform in Poland. There were two arguments explaining the benefits of reform. Firstly, the new layout of school stages would facilitate modification of teaching methods and the curriculum according to pupils' specific needs and age. Second, structural reform should be followed by curricular reform and support it significantly. Until then conservative teachers had been in a rut and had not responded to appeals to show new quality in their work. However, structural reform could not be ignored so easily. As the Polish Ministry anticipated, it would be difficult to use the old methods in new schools. And thus the reform would offer an impulse to deep reflection inside the teachers' community and it was expected to create a positive change in curriculum and in teaching styles.

In the Czech Republic, there were many initiatives towards educational reforms. Nevertheless, the lack of political will to push through the ideas that could become a base for the formulation of educational policy goals is characteristic of the 1990s. Since the mid-1990s many studies have appeared. The most comprehensive materials are *Budoucnost vzdělání a školství v obnovené demokratické společnosti*

a ve sjednocující se Evropě (The Future of Education and Schooling in a Restored Democratic Society and in Uniting Europe, edited by J. Kotásek at the Faculty of Education, Prague) and *Svoboda ve vzdělání a česká škola* (Freedom in Education and the Czech School, NEMES). In 1994, MŠMT ČR (The Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic) came up with the document *Program rozvoje vzdělávací soustavy České republiky – Kvalita a odpovědnost* (The Development Program of the Educational System of the Czech Republic – Quality and Responsibility). In this paper the principles of new curricular policy were defined for the first time, but this document was left as a statement of intent. In 1995 *Standard základního vzdělávání* (The Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education) was introduced and presented a basic framework for a school in the context of a decentralised school system by formulating educational goals and content through a core-curriculum. In 1996 – 1997, the Standard was worked up in three accredited educational programs *Obecná škola*, *Základní škola* and *Národní škola* which replaced the existing curriculum and educational plan.

In 1995 a review for the OECD, *Proměny vzdělávacího systému v České republice* (Changes to the Educational System in the Czech Republic) was an important source of inspiration for educational policy in the Czech Republic. It was followed by *Zpráva examinatorů OECD o vzdělávacím systému v České republice* (The Review of the Examiners of the OECD about the Educational System in the Czech Republic, 1996) and the analytical study *České vzdělávání a Evropa – strategie rozvoje lidských zdrojů v ČR při vstupu do Evropské unie* (Czech Education and Europe – the Strategy of Human Resources Development in the Czech Republic on Entering the European Union, 1999). Some important requirements and suggestions for the educational system were powerfully formulated in those documents. A crucial turning-point in the process of transformation came finally with *Národní program rozvoje vzdělávání – Bílá kniha* (The National Program of Education Development 2001), which contains a key outline of future educational development. This document was negotiated by the government and defined solemnly the main strategic directions of Czech educational policy.

The aims of the transformation of the Polish educational system come from a government Bill concerning social and economic policy entitled *Strategia dla Polski* (Strategy for Poland) from 1994. A parliamentary debate based on the document *Directions for Improvement of the System of Education in Poland* preceded the Strategy in May 1994. In the section named *Investment in Human Resources* the document contains a diagnosis; it identifies the main goals, sources, threats and the main efficiency criteria of the educational system. In the section devoted to diagnosis it is claimed: „Persistent low expenditure levels on education and science are now the main obstacle to restructuring the Polish economy...” The program empowered the Ministry of National Education to propose to the government the most important tasks and to suggest solutions. In the subsequent document *The Ministry of National Education Policy in the Field of Human Resources Development, Achievements, Projects, Barriers* (December 1995), some relevant tasks are formulated. There is, for example, the suggestion of establishing the compulsory education of

six-year-old children. In the sphere of improving the quality of education a core-curriculum is proposed which would define the principles of general education through priority goals. There is also an introduction of an alternative curriculum which will illustrate the fulfilment of educational tasks mentioned in the core-curriculum. At last the document contains the preparation and implementation of the reform of the system of evaluation and assessment.

The identical component of both education systems is the focus on the curriculum. Related to the White Paper, the accomplishment of curricular projects became the priority in the process of Czech compulsory education transformation. The Ministry of Education has worked up the strategy and method of carrying out the reform and modernising educational goals and content in *Dlouhodobý záměr vzdělávání a rozvoje vzdělávací soustavy České republiky* (The Long-term Intention of Education and the Development of the Educational System of the Czech Republic, March 2002). The reform consists of dividing competencies and responsibilities for the content of education between the centre and the schools. The key concept is the Framework Educational Program (RVP), a national document according to which every school develops its own School Educational Program (ŠVP). The Framework Educational Program emerges from a new approach to compulsory education. This is based on providing a set of key competencies to pupils instead of an obsolete stress on acquiring a huge amount of information by heart. The Framework Educational Program is expected to create some positive tendencies in teaching. For example, the individual needs and abilities of pupils should be taken into account, in order to introduce more variable organisation and individualisation of teaching, creating a positive social, emotional and working atmosphere. It should also stimulate changes in pupils' assessment, carrying it out on continuous assessment basis, using norms tailored to the individual and with greater use of verbal assessment. The Long-term Intention 2002 also specified the timetable of the preparation of the Framework Educational Programs and their implementation, including the network of pilot schools and creating the support system for extending teacher training.

The new concept of core-curriculum was accepted in Poland in 1998 after many years of complaints about an overloaded curriculum. The concept was developed in 1990, a time when Polish schools were facing a critical lack of money. In that situation the schools had to make some reductions in their teaching plans. Therefore the Ministry of Education had to define at least the minimal curricular requirements.

The core-curriculum defines the knowledge and skills for each of the three educational stages which must be adopted by all pupils. In other words, it is the results and outputs of the teaching process that is important. However, it leaves it up to schools how they obtain those outputs and thus it offers autonomy and responsibility to schools. The reform totally changed the rules and the statutory framework that defines what must be taught in Polish schools. The new mechanism is expected to strengthen school and teacher autonomy and it should create conditions for fast and flexible responses to local needs. Schools are free to decide

what methods to use to obtain the required educational results.

Those changes introduced new terminology in Polish education: 'integrated teaching', 'educational pathway', 'teaching in blocks'. Another notion frequently used in official documents, "educational activities", refers to the delegation to schools of the right to organise their work using different approaches outside the traditional apportionment of school time. There is a clear effort not only to implement changes in organisation and teaching methods through the core-curriculum, but also to change the whole conception of teaching and school culture.

4. The Current Situation

According to the new Educational Act, the Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic is working on a long-term plan of education. The plan is evaluated every two years and is adapted if necessary. The new *Dlouhodobý záměr vzdělávání a rozvoje vzdělávací soustavy ČR* (The Long-term Strategy for Education and the Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic) was presented to the government in the first half of 2005. The material reflects the main planning documents and their implementation in each period. It sets such tasks for the next two years as can be managed. Curricular reform is still a priority. The processing of *Manuál pro tvorbu školních vzdělávacích programů* (The Working Manual for School Educational Programs) is noted as well as the adoption of a system developing program co-financing through the European Structural Fund.

In the school year 2005/06 the Czech School Inspectorate evaluated the preparation of School Educational Programs at primary schools and the state of preparation of head teachers and teachers for new tasks. The Inspectorate found that preparatory work had begun in all the schools they visited. The range and intensity of activities connected to curricular reform were slowly increasing. 9% of schools (out of the 22.4% of schools registered in the Czech Republic) visited by the Inspectorate had their School Educational Program finished and one third of them were piloting the Programs in the teaching process.

In 2005 Stálá konference asociací ve vzdělávání (SKAV, The Permanent Conference of the Association in Education) presented an analytical text *Vymezení hlavních problémů ohrožujících realizaci kurikulární reformy* (The Delimitation of the Main Problems Threatening Curricular Reform Implementation) in order to show the problematic parts of the curricular reform and any discrepancies in it. Among other things they mentioned: „We see a risk in insufficient coordination of the detailed components of the curricular reform. According to our point of view, the unsatisfactory coordination of curricular reform with other stages of educational policy threatens the prospect of success.“ *Institut pro sociální a ekonomické analýzy* (ISEA, The Institute for Social and Economic Analysis) developed during the same year an extremely critical study *Na cestě ke znalostní společnosti. Kde jsme...?* (On the Way to a Knowledge Society. Where Are We?) The aim of the study was to eliminate the illusion that the problems of Czech education have been satisfactorily solved. The authors state that „no fundamental reform has been introduced, let alone

implemented, since the White Paper was published. Until now, all the authorities have underestimated the strategic importance of the development of the educational system and the relevancy of educational reforms." The role of the White Paper is questioned by a statement that there is a false presumption that the Czech educational system has already got its strategic document. Yet the White Paper does not oblige the Ministry to take any action. A year later, the president of the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus, mentioned it in an interview for *Učitel'ský zpravodaj* (Teachers' Newsletter, 4.9.2006): „I can not see any serious reforms of our education around me. Those formal administrative changes are out of my horizon." (!)

The most current impetus for Czech education comes from the promise of the government parties ODS, KDU-ČSL and SZ incorporated in their *coalition treaty* from December 28, 2006: „We will continue with free primary and secondary education in the standard range. We will guarantee equal support to all schools, no matter who established them, as education is a public service for all. We will finish the Framework Educational Programs and only then will we connect them to the introduction of the state *Maturita* Examination."

The Polish *Institut Spraw Publicznych* (ISP, The Institute of Public Affairs) has carried out a lot of qualitative research into the transformation of the educational system after introducing the reform in 1999 called *Monitoring of the Educational Reform in Poland*. The project was financed with the support of the Ministry of Education carried out from 2000 to 2004. The basic work method to use a representative sample of primary and secondary schools. It studied one of the aims of the reform – reaching a higher standard of education and schooling. The authors note in the final report *Recommendations for Educational Policy after Three Years of School Reform*: „The institutionalization of the core curriculum may be helpful. This important, yet consistently marginalized document will be able to play its expected role in education only if it is the subject of ongoing, unrestrained discussion among experts. For this purpose a curriculum committee should be established, reporting to the Ministry of Education, consisting of scholars and practitioners."

The current developing document, compiled by the Polish Ministry of Education in August 2005, is *Strategia Rozwoju Edukacji na Lata 2007 – 2013* (The Strategy for 2007 – 2013). A very interesting feature is the SWOT analysis of the educational system. As strengths within the sphere of compulsory education progress in reading literacy (based on tests PISA) and the development of school network are mentioned. Further planned developments are the regulation of the textbook market, introducing English as a compulsory subject from grade 1 and reaching European language standards. There are also plans to support the quality of education in rural areas, establishing a National Institute of Education and creating a quality system of financial support for education. It would be interesting to analyze in detail both ministry documents that were introduced at the same moment. Such an analysis is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

In May 2006, the Ministry was administratively split into the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

Over 12,000 teachers from Poland came to Warsaw in March 2007 to protest

against the policy of the minister of education Roman Giertych. As the media said, Giertych caused hostile reactions from teachers, students and parents by a reform called Zero Tolerance, which had already been adopted by the Parliament. Beside other things the reform introduces obligatory school uniforms, limited use of mobile phones and camera systems in school buildings.

5. The Role of 'Executive Subjects' in the Realisation of Educational Policy

After the state school administration was decentralised in the Czech Republic during the reform of public administration, the development of a tool for maintaining a consistent state school policy is the long-term aim of education and of the development of the educational system. The Ministry publishes its long-term intentions every odd year. After discussion with the regional authorities the document is proposed to the government which passes it to the Parliament. Each year, the Ministry submits an annual report on the development of education. It takes into account the annual reports which are prepared by the regional authorities. The annual report for 2005 is symptomatically called *S novým školským zákonem* (With the New Educational Act). It sums up in dates and subjects the first year with the new school legislation.

The regional authorities work up their long-term intention for their territory. They take into account the long-term intentions of the Ministry. This two-layered system of mutually linked documents of school policy has a lot of potential as an important communicative tool mediating between the centre and the regional authorities. The impact of the regional long-term intentions (as the new tools of strategic management of education system) on the local sector "is not possible to evaluate as they have only been working for a short time. However, we can state that the awareness of schools and their partners rose rapidly in the last school year." notes the Czech School Inspectorate in its *Annual Report for the School Year 2005/06*.

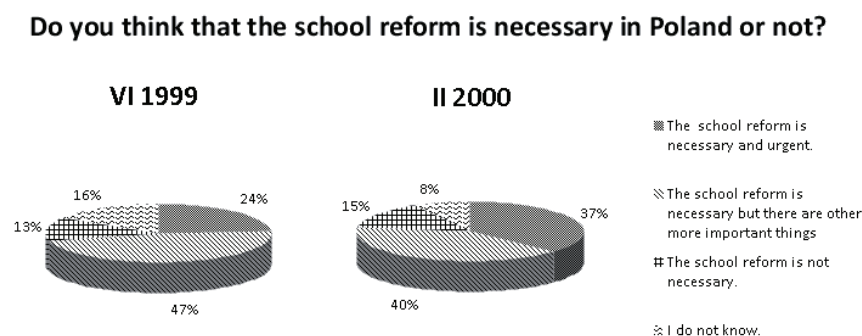
The educational policy in Poland is implemented centrally. The Ministry has the main role in initiating policy and management. The Parliament is responsible for the final edition of documents that determine the orientation of educational policy. The main school body at the regional level (16 *województwo*) is *kurator oświaty* who carries out the policy of the Ministry. The Ministry implements state educational policy in cooperation with the regional authorities. *Kurator* is responsible for cooperation with local self-governing bodies when making and implementing educational policy (consistent with state policy) at regional and local level.

6. Reform of Polish Education: Inspiration or Memento for the Czech Republic?

Both mentioned educational reforms determine state goals. The basis of the transformation effort is to increase the quality of education connected with an effort aimed at internal changes and at overcoming traditional school attitudes. These can be seen in the new school organisation and teaching methods. The final receiver of these values is a particular child, participant in compulsory education. The initiation of teaching according to the school educational programs is confirmed in the Educational Act of the Czech Republic. It will start in the school year 2007/08 at 1st and 6th grade. This means that the curricular reform of primary and lower secondary education will be completed in 2011/12. The large structural and curricular reform in Poland started in 1999/2000 and was formally finished by the end of 2005/06. Those collateral reforms offer a large area for comparative research. It might give the Czech Republic some experience and practical assistance from a comparable state and opportunities to improve processes and procedures within its own system.

For example, the degree of advance awareness of the school reform in Poland was very low in the year 2000 according the research of CBOS (the Centre for Public Research): 57% questioned people answered that they had heard about the reform, yet they did not actually know what it was about. 14% admitted that they knew nothing about the reform at all and only 29% said they understood its principles. The school reform was identified as necessary by 37% respondents from 1100, which is a 13% increase compared to the year 1999 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Public perceptions of school reform in Poland



Source: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, <http://www.cbos.pl>

Nevertheless, the research data from the following year (2001) indicate that the level of satisfaction with the reformed school system operation varies and negative

attitudes predominate. As table No. 2 from the year 2001 shows, 37% out of 1069 randomly questioned people rate the previous education system a better one.

Table 2. Level of satisfaction with the reformed school system operation in Poland

Do you consider the operation of the school system better or worse than before the implementation of the school reform?	The answers of respondents according the terms of a survey					
	VI 2000		X 2000		I 2001	
	%					
Much better	1	16	1	12	2	14
Slightly better	15		11		12	
Neither better nor worse	23	23	27	27	26	26
Slightly worse	22	35	20	38	24	37
Much worse	13		18		13	
I do not know	26	26	23	23	23	23

Source: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, <http://www.cbos.pl>

According to the research of SOÚ (the Sociological Institute of the Science Academy of the Czech Republic) from March 2006, the public is quite satisfied with primary and secondary education. „The majority of citizens do not feel any need of reforms in the field of primary and secondary education. Only 36% from 1076 respondents were in favour of reform.” The cultivation of general competencies was recognised as a priority by 16% only.

The following statement, which is worthy of further research, contradicts the developing programs of educational politics and the rigid statistics of Eurydice that are not able to say much about the real transformation processes in real schools: „It is naive to suppose that it is enough to redefine the educational goals, to set up a new curriculum or to reformulate teachers' working competencies and requirements to change their way of thinking and behaving or their beliefs.” (Thurler, 2005, p. 117). The transformation of school culture is, according to the author, a more or less voluntary act. No central mechanisms of any political kind could orientate school culture towards openness to changes. Each innovative attempt will be inescapably confronted by the conviction, views and impact of the teachers themselves.

One of the basic sources of failure is the resistance which teachers show against any effort to change their practices. All projects were finally subordinated to the reaction of the mass of teachers. Those reforms coming from above often threaten the sense of worth which the teachers have in their work and their everyday professional and personal life. The proclaimed space for initiative and involvement in school decisions, planning and other matters will probably collide with the different opinions of people facing Herculean tasks of reform.

The structural reform of Polish education hopes that the fact that the external influences are so strong will change the orientation and the main goals of education

and replace the old values and norms. This model assumes that teachers' identify with the new culture, take it to heart and acquire the values which the reform exhorts them to adopt. However, as Prokop (2002) says, only 15% of teachers promote at least one half of the reform demands. One half or more of the reform projects are rejected by more than 70% of teachers. 56% indicate that their colleagues do not accept the reform. 64% required the whole reform to be stopped. About 20% teachers assume that there will be very few changes at schools in spite of the reform.

Kalibro, the questionnaire from May 2005, offers data about how the curricular reform is perceived by Czech teachers and how they assess the suggested innovations.

Table 3. Perception of curriculum reform in the Czech Republic

Formerly, not teachers but the state was responsible for the curriculum. Nowadays it seems that a part of the responsibility will be delegated to the teachers. Do you welcome this change?	61.4%
Do you expect that the curriculum will be changed in your teaching subject at your school with the beginning of reform and the school educational program?	68.8%
Do you expect to change your own teaching approaches and methods due to the reform and the School Educational Program?	42.8%
Are you excited and qualified enough to influence constructively the conception and aims of education in your School Educational Program?	56.7%

Teachers' opinions taken from The School and Me. N = 4206. The numbers are of those replying 'yes' to each question.

Table 4. Head teachers' opinions about the curriculum reform in the Czech Republic

Do you expect that the curriculum will be changed in the majority of teaching subjects at your school through the reform and the School Educational Program?	25.4%
How many teachers, in your opinion, will be willing and able to change radically their teaching approaches and methods in the light of the reform and the School Educational Program?	51.5%

Head teachers' opinions taken from The School and Me. N = 350.

To sum up, there still exist a risk that current goals, norms, opinions and behaviour patterns of the main players in the reform, teachers, will remain deep-rooted. Enforcement of the new educational paradigm will not be then practicable.

7. Instead of a Conclusion: The Current Paradigm of Educational Policy seen through the Prism of the Past

Formally, contemporary educational reform consists of way of administering the administration of official curricular documents (the Czech Republic) and of the structural arrangement of the educational system (Poland).

The author of this paper considers it worthy of note that the priorities of the educational policy in the transformation process of both countries show (with few differences) periodical aspects. They could be paraphrased using the following quotations:

“The institutions of the educational system should be the main forces working to meet contemporary challenges for the programme of far-reaching reforms to be implemented in the People’s Republic of Poland.” (The Ministry of National Education in *Report for the International Office in Geneva for the 41st Session of the International Education Conference*, Warsaw, 1988.)

„The new structural arrangement of basic education is ensured through the individual approach to pupils in teaching process, the respect for the different development of all pupils, the use of cooperative teaching. (...) Compared to the existing traditional teaching, focused on conning by rote and the mechanical reproduction of the curriculum, the basis of the educational work of basic school consists of the systematic development of active and creative work by pupils.” (*Following Development of Czechoslovak Educational System*, 1976).

The statements mentioned above thus induce concerns about the content of educational policy being only promising rhetoric instead of true effort for real change throughout society.

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