

WHAT IS NEW IN CZECH EDUCATION SYSTEM?

Topical problems of Czech education.

The process of the development of Czech education has been accelerated by passing and altering some legislation, namely the passing of Acts no. 561/2004 (on pre-school, basic, secondary, and post-secondary technical and other types of education – the School Act), no. 563/2004 (on pedagogical workers and changing some statutes), Further Education Act and the regulation of the Ministry of Education no. 317/2005 on further education of pedagogical workers, accreditation committee and carrier system of pedagogical workers.

1. Curriculum reform

Nowadays a new system of curriculum documents for education of pupils from 3 to 19 years old is being implemented. The documents are being developed at two levels – the state and school levels. The state represented by the Ministry of Education issued the Framework educational programmes (FEP), which establish a binding framework of education and qualify standard education content for a given period of education. Every school prepares their school educational programme (SEP), which is based on the particular FEP and which specifies the education at that particular school.

The programmes are now being tested on basic and grammar schools. It is supposed that all basic schools will start teaching according to SEP from 2007/8, grammar schools from about 2010.

Fundamental reasons and starting points for creating FEP for grammar school education were to produce a programme which would balance the amount of knowledge that pupils learn at school and the ability to apply the knowledge, to use it in practical life and to develop necessary skills. Therefore the conception of education starts from the **key competencies** which include competencies in the area of learning, solving problems, communication, social competencies, interpersonal competencies, and civil competencies. An essential change will be brought by the conception of educational content. The core consists of **expected outputs** determining the level of knowledge and skills which should be reached by pupils after finishing the school.

Another important part of the educational content is the **subject-matter** which should be a means of attaining the expected outputs for pupils.

Educational content is divided into 8 **educational areas** which are further subdivided into educational fields with closely related contents. This approach emphasizes overlapping interdisciplinary areas and can provide an inspiration for connecting their contents.

RCP for grammar schools in the system of two-level educational curricula in the Czech Republic represents the **state standard of the graduation level at grammar schools** which must be fulfilled by all schools.

The second type of curriculum (SET) consists of the particular curriculum documents of each school, the **school educational programmes** which strengthen the autonomy of the school. SEP present specific conditions and specialization of each school and develop the FEP into

their own teaching plans and curricula. Schools will be able to integrate educational contents of fields and thus develop their own individual specialization.

2. School leaving examination

The school leaving examination (i. e. secondary school graduation exam) is laid down in the School Act. In accordance with this Act pupils will sit for the new examination in 2007/8 the first time.

The organization model of the school leaving examination will be strictly based on several fundamental principles. They are: *the significance of school* as the basic unit of educational process, the requirements of *reliability and comparability of the results* of the examination, *personal data protection* and the principle of *democracy, transparency and subsidiarity*.

2.1 Common part of school leaving examination

The common part of the school leaving examination offers space for determining the minimum (basic) requirements of the state for the content and level of the results of pupils' education. The state requires them from the schools providing secondary education finished by the school leaving examination, regardless of the type or the founder. The common part is therefore of a general character.

The common part can also be defined as a part embracing the general educational content of secondary schools which are otherwise varied and autonomous. The ministry has the authority to determine the content and form of the exams in the scope given by law. The content of the exam in the common part is specified in catalogues of requirements for the school leaving examination. The content and form and the criteria of assessment of the common part is determined by the Ministry of Education. The exams have the same level of difficulty for all graduating students. The content of the exams is focused on the basic knowledge and skills which are important for the future life of a pupil.

All graduating pupils, regardless of the type of their school, will take three exams in the common part:

- a) from Czech language
- b) from a foreign language
- c) optional exam

Czech language and foreign language exams will consist of three parts:

- didactical test
- structured written assignment
- oral exam

2.2 optional exam

A pupil chooses an optional exam from four offered possibilities, which are the following:

- a) mathematics
- b) civic fundamentals
- c) science-technical fundamentals
- d) information-technological fundamentals

2.3 Profiled part of the exam

This part of the examination provides a possibility to profile the school and pupils, to apply their specific features and intentions. The exams of the profiled part of the school leaving examination are in the competence of the headteachers – they determine compulsory exams and their forms in relation to the needs of the school and their pupils. The profiled part

consists of three compulsory exams. When preparing the offer of profiled exams the headteacher is obliged to respect the school graduate profile. Beyond the scope of three compulsory exams, a pupil can choose optional exams. They choose from the offer made by the school as well as exams set by the Ministry. Optional exams serve for personal profiling a pupil beyond the scope of the school profile. A pupil can sit for four optional exams maximum. The results are stated in the final certificate, however, they are not calculated as a part of the final result.

3. Assessment at the level of a pupil

3.1 Overall situation

The current situation is a result of traditional approach which corresponded to a different conception of education and to a different nature of educational system. Evaluation was limited only to some levels (mainly of a pupil) and forms (almost always subjective). Although the current transformation of the Czech education system has noticed partial evaluation activities in the last ten years, it has not brought, and there even have not existed conscious attempts to make, a new comprehensive system. After the overall liberalization of the previous restrictive precautions there appeared a certain loosening of the education system already in the mid-1990s and consequently its effectiveness decreased.

3.2. Proposal for the solution

Evaluation in the “knot points” of the education path of pupils in the area of basic education

The aim is to create a system of evaluation of pupils' results in the knot points of their education path (i. e. at the end of the first and second level of schooling). Evaluation will comprise two main sources of information about a pupil, i. e. a national assessment exam and a personal portfolio of a pupil. The preparation of these tools will take place independently, they mean an interconnected group of tools for finding information about the pupil from the point of view of their application in pedagogical practice. Their separation is undesirable from the evaluation point of view because this would lead to denying the objective of the current curriculum reform.

Personal portfolios and national assessment exam results will be used in entrance examinations to secondary schools, whereby the difficulties connected with the pupils' transition from basic to secondary schools will decrease and at the same time the informative value of entrance examinations will increase. The national assessment examination will become one of the sources for the school evaluation and the school system evaluation.

Up-to-date situation

On July 1, 2005 a seminar on education reform took place in the Chamber of Deputies. It attracted an extraordinary attention – over 200 teachers and public administration officials participated in it. The Minister of Education, Petra Buzková, the chairperson of the school committee of the Chamber of Deputies, and representatives of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic took part as well.

The papers and discussions pointed out at several important problems:

- the sense of education transformation has not been sufficiently promoted in the media since its very beginning. The talk of the Minister of Education presented at the seminar should have been read many months ago in the government, Parliament and in the media.
- The curriculum reform is not sufficiently backed from the state budget (e. g. increasing number of separated lessons, optional subjects, assessing teachers for good-quality lessons or

extra work, assistants, school psychologists, special pedagogues, increasing costs for teachers' education, modern equipment, projects, ...). The government should realize that the transformed education system will be more expensive than the current one.

- Further education of teachers has not been ensured (not only creating SEP, but also new methods, using analytical tools, self-assessment of schools and teachers, ...). The offer is shattered, and it is often not financially acceptable for schools. Many teachers have not comprehended the aims of the reform yet. Associations, agencies, and magazines cannot substitute the state!
- The state should find a way how to influence the pregraduation preparation of teachers and encyclopaedic character of entrance examinations to universities
- The preparation of FEP for secondary education and new school leaving examinations is far from being consistent. There exists a discrepancy between the content of the examination and the content of education. Participants worried about too much content and unrealistic time schedule.
- There should not be changes in the course of the course of the studies. Even this year's first year students at secondary schools do not know the catalogues of the requirements for the new school leaving examination in 2008. The work on the oral part of exams almost has not started yet.
- There has not been an agreement on the content of FEP of secondary education or school leaving examination, it is difficult to find the intersection of various education programmes.
- The implementation of single parts of the reform is not balanced – some parts are prepared in a great detail, however, there does not exist an agreement on the basic meaning of the reform either in the professional, or in the general public. Changing the thinking of people is a very difficult and long-term task.

Transformation of education is undoubtedly a complicated problem which takes a long time. What should be important is that the whole system must work well.