

BEING A TEACHER IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract: *Being a teacher means always something different, depending on where in Europe or in the world you are. Yet there are many things in common. This chapter speaks about the situation in the Czech Republic, which is in many aspects similar to the situation in other European countries. Changes in roles of teacher, social statuses of teachers, feminisation and ageing of the teachers will be discussed in the following chapter.*

1. Introduction – changes in the teacher’s roles

The roles of teachers have changed dramatically worldwide. Because of the globalisation, IT society, learning society and life-long learning, the role of the teacher has changed from the source of information and the truth to the manager and co-ordinator of learning and learning conditions. In addition to that, there are other important changes, namely in the so-called post-communist countries. In a socialist state, the teacher was an ideology provider. Ideologically and politically, the teacher was controlled by the state and at the same time he/she observed through the pupils the families and their political feelings. The teachers were simply bureaucrats, carrying out strict instructions.

After the Velvet revolution in 1989, many teachers were disoriented, because old ways were no longer acceptable and few people had any democratic experience. The teachers were supposed to recreate and reformulate many of the key education ideas by themselves. Also the teacher’s status in society changed. Before the World War II, teachers were respected because of their education. In the socialist era, teachers were just workmen, whom the parents could not fully trust, as they were closely connected with the ruling communistic party. Nevertheless, majority of families respected and helped the teachers. After 1989, this changed, as the parents tend to disrespect the teachers and encourage the feeling of disrespect for teachers in their children. Now is the situation stabilised and similar to the situation in other EU-countries.

After 1989, gaps in wages of different professions opened and teachers began to be paid poorly, which remains until today. In the newly established market economy, the role of the teacher was being underestimated and the common feeling was that clever people who want to earn money to support their families would never go and teach. Fortunately, this is beginning to change.

These changes are facilitated by the White Book of 2001 which emphasises the importance of the change of roles and professional perspective of teachers and academics:

- *to support a change in the approach and performance of teacher profession in all institutions of education,*
- *to strengthen social and professional status of teachers and academics,*
- *to improve the quality of their preparatory and further education,*
- *to create conditions for their career development, growth and stronger motivation towards personal development and team work.*

2. The teacher in school

There are many differences regarding the teacher depending on the educational stage they teach at. In kindergartens there are almost exclusively women-teachers. One or two teachers work with a small group of around twenty children. In the primary classes of basic schools, each class has just one teacher. Due to the high level of feminisation in Czech schooling (similarly to the rest of Europe) this is in vast majority a woman. Teachers who prefer teaching some subjects (English, Physical Education, Music) tend to swap these for the subjects they do not enjoy teaching, and so some teachers specialise in teaching one subject. In lower secondary classes, each subject is taught by a different teacher. A typical teacher teaches two or three subjects at the maximum. The same applies for upper secondary classes.

3. Numbers of teachers

There are 175 500 teachers (2000/01) ¹ in the Czech Republic, which is only approximately 45% of all people working in the education field. In 1996 there were 3.7 doctors for 1 000 people, but 17.4 teachers. The number of teachers has increased by 50% since 1970's. Therefore the costs of education (namely because of the wages) increased. The status of a teacher is defined by the type of school they teach at. The common and very wrong opinion (in the Czech Republic as well as in many other European countries) is that for lower school levels, lower teacher's education is sufficient. This is also rapidly changing in this country, as even nursery school teachers are to be educated at universities in the future.

40% of all teachers in the Czech Republic teach at basic schools - 68 155 teachers (2000/01). Many teachers work at the pre-primary level (23 800). See the following table.

Type of school	In Statistic yearbook of education 2000/01 performance indicators 2001 (in % of all teachers)
Basic schools (ZŠ)	38,8
1. stage (primary education)	18,4
2. stage (lower secondary education)	20,4
Nursery schools (MŠ)	14,7
Upper secondary technical schools (SOŠ)	13,5
Higher education institutions (VŠ)	8,9
Vocational schools (SOU)	7,5
Grammar schools	7,1
Special schools	5,9
Colleges (VOŠ)	3,3

4. The feminisation

The level of feminisation of the Czech education system is very high. In 1996, 73.8 per cent of all people working in schools were women. 76.1 per cent in health service, but 35.9 per cent in agriculture and 11.6 in building industry. The teacher of today is a woman-teacher. This is true in all of the OECD countries on the pre-primary, primary and lower secondary levels. The number of men-teachers in the higher secondary level increases and on the tertiary level there are more men than women teachers (Education at a Glance, 2001).

¹ Stat. ročenka školství 2000/01 – Výkonové ukazatele 2001

In 2001, there were 99.8 per cent women in the pre-primary education, whereas in the OECD countries it was 94.6. Generally, there are fewer men in primary and secondary education in this country than in many countries of the OECD. There were 84.5 per cent women in primary education (OECD 77%), 81 per cent women in lower secondary (OECD 62.7), 56.3 per cent women in higher secondary education (OECD 48.9). Even more women work in the primary education systems of U.S.A., Italy and Austria and in the higher secondary education systems of Finland, Italy and Slovakia. Out of all OECD countries, the Czech Republic employs the most women in the tertiary education (over 50%).

The feminisation of the Czech education is still slowly increasing, while the teachers' population is slowly ageing.

Why are there so many women in schools?

- Some professions are traditionally considered male and some female. There has never been much competition between men and woman within one profession.
- Teaching jobs are low-paid, usually below the state average.
- Studying at faculties of education is considered easier than studying at other faculties and students tend to study at faculties of education only after failing to be accepted to more prestigious schools.
- Education can be an area the women like to work in. 70 per cent of the students of faculties of education are women and it has been so since the 70's.
- It may be so that women choose teaching, because of the compatibility with family duties, long vacation, shorter period of actually being present at work, etc. The reasons may vary greatly.

5. Young people in the teaching profession?

The teaching staff of the Czech schools is ageing, due to the following reasons:

- The graduates leaving faculties of education do not search for teaching jobs.
- Teaching becomes gradually more difficult, as the children become more aggressive and less motivated, concentrated and disciplined.
- Teachers are underpaid, especially at the beginning of their teaching career (every manual worker is said to be better paid). An international comparative survey rated Czech teachers among the worst paid in all OECD countries. Therefore about 35 per cent Czech teachers have a second job.
- Teaching is not a prestigious profession, although some surveys show that high-school and university teachers are relatively highly respected.
- Teachers' education is general and specific at the same time, so it is not difficult for the graduates to find jobs outside schools.

There are still many young people applying for faculties of education. In 1990, there were 4 777 students accepted to faculties of education. In 2001 it was 6 903 students, while many more future teachers study at other faculties and choose teaching later. Some study fields are

more applied for (more prestigious) and therefore it is more difficult to be accepted (only 4 per cent of the students applying for the German teaching courses succeed in the entrance exams and are accepted, while 68 per cent of the students applying for math teaching courses are accepted²). The social profile of student-teachers is quite specific, as A) there is a strong generation continuity – many students' parents are also teachers and B) more students than at other faculties come from lower middle class. At least 12 per cent of the graduates never start to teach. Another 35 percent start teaching, but leave the profession. The first year in the job is considered crucial, it is the so-called professional start; the beginning teacher undergoes a reality shock and finds that they are unprepared for what they see in the school. In addition to that the beginning teachers struggle with the conditions in the school (equipment and facilities), low wages, the lack of systematic help from the school management, too much lessons per week or the school culture.

6. Teaching profession – a prestigious job?

Is teaching a prestigious profession in your country? Maybe it depends on the school type. According to surveys in the Czech republic (1993), university teachers placed third and basic school teachers seventh most prestigious profession among 70 other occupations. Sociological researches confirm this – teaching profession is complicated and require high qualification. On the other hand, teachers feel that the prestige of teaching is really low and for many teachers this is the reason to quit teaching. One of the problems might be the lack of professional pride, which is felt even with student-teachers. But the situation starts to improve.

The reason for low prestige of teaching were mentioned in the previous chapters; low wages, seemingly easy studies, feminisation, personal experience with a poor teacher. In addition to that there is a lack of objective assessment criteria for teaching. In order to better the conditions of teachers, a new system of financing is being considered. It is the so-called career development system, which is similar to that of doctors.

Discussion

- What could be the positive/negative effects of feminisation in schools?
- Teachers' wages are below average in the Czech Republic (€ 475 a month). What is the situation in your country?
- Are young people interested in studying for teachers in your country?
- Why did you, personally, decide to study for a teacher?
- What do you think are the roles of teacher today? Is he/she still just an information transmitter?
- Do you find teaching an interesting/prestigious profession?

Literature:

www.eurydice.org – see publications about teacher profession

² Faculty of Education, Charles University. 1999.