



## Out of School Education in the Czech Republic

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### Abstract

*The paper analyzes the emergence of home education in European post-communist countries after 1989. The case of the Czech Republic representing the development and characteristic features of home education in the whole region is studied in detail. The paper concentrates on the analysis of the driving forces behind the emergence of home education in the country, namely the civic organizations and the parents associations. The history of home education after 1989 in the Czech Republic is described in detail, with the emphasis on the relation between home education promoters, schools and state authorities, and the development of legislation regulating home education. Current homeschooling legislation is analyzed in detail with special attention paid to the processes of the legal enrolment of individuals into home education, the process of supervision and assessment of educational results of homes educated children. The article concludes that despite the existence of country-specific characteristics, many features of Czech home education are similar to more general pattern of home education in the post-communist countries. These generally include the rather strict regulation of home education and the high importance of schools as both gate-keeping and supervising institutions.*

*Keywords: Home education, out of school education, Czech Republic*

### 1. Introduction

Political transformation, which followed “Velvet Revolution” in Czech Republic in 1989, led to many other changes in society. Above all, the education system has undergone major modifications. For example, abolishment of the state monopoly on education gave rise to the establishment of private and denominational schools. Thanks to this development parents have got the new opportunity to choose a suitable school for their children. They could choose from a relatively wide range of both public and alternative schools. In addition to that, their choice was not restricted by their place of residence because parents in the Czech Republic have the right to send their child to any school anywhere, provided that the school still has the capacity after children from the school district have been preferentially enrolled.

### 2. Introducing home schooling as new form of parents involvement in education of their children

The changes that started after 1989 have not affected legislation only. The attitude of parents towards their children's school education have been changed as well. Parents who took over the role of passive clients of education system in last decades transformed themselves into active participants shaping the school education of their children. They not only started to choose a school for the children, but also more often acted as self-confident partners of schools, partners who are interested in participating in decision making about what their children learn and how. Immediately after 1989 many such changes in school system were welcomed by teachers, academics, psychologists and society in general. But only few years later, in 1996, some parents went further than educators and society in general expected and that they could even imagine before: they began to seek possibility to teach their children at home by themselves. They demanded educational option known as home schooling.

#### 2.1 Introducing experimental verification of home schooling

Although it initially seemed unlikely, after a relatively brief but very intense lobbying of promoters of home schooling, the government allowed this form of education but through very specific way: like experimental verification of this form of education under the state control. This experimental verification of home schooling has been authorized by the Ministry of Education. The experiment, designed exclusively for children at elementary school level, started at 1st September 1998 and continued until 2005. Later, Ministry run a second experiment designed for children on lower secondary school level, from 2007 until 2016.

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Supporters of legalization of this form of education have taken following steps to promote their case. They founded association called: *"Friends of the home schooling"*, whose goal was to gather supporters, to inform the general public about this alternative form of education and, above all, seek its full legalization. Despite intense lobbying, full legislation of home schooling did not take place until 2005 when home schooling option was legalized at elementary school level and 2016, when this option legally opened for children at lower secondary level (Jančaříková 2017, Kašparová 2015a, 2015b, Kostelecká 2005, 2010, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2017, Mertin 2003, Štech 2003). Since January 2017 home schooling it is also possible for children in the last year of preschool, which became the first year of compulsory schooling recently.

## **2.2 The practice of home schooling during the experiment**

Every state in which home schooling is legal alternative seeks to keep control over this way of education. In the Czech Republic, primary schools in which pupils were officially enrolled to fulfil the duty of the compulsory school attendance became state appointed guarantors of home schooling quality. These schools were responsible for control whether curricular requirements were followed by home schooling families, and especially for controlling the level of education that was provided to children at home. In the first year of home schooling experiment the Ministry of Education signed a cooperation agreement with two denominational primary schools that, thus, officially became guarantors of home schooling. In the second year of the experiment two public schools were chosen as guarantors by the Ministry due to higher parents' interest in participation in the experimental verification of this form of education.

The Ministry of Education had set the conditions under which the experimental verification was conducted. Great powers have been entrusted to the headmasters of participating schools. Directors of these schools had responsibility to decide which child could be involved in experiment and had also determined form of pupils' assessment. The Ministry of Education created no restrictive conditions for the functioning of the home education except condition to follow prescribed standards for elementary schools and obligatory pupils' assessment by school at least twice per school year. In addition participating schools had obligation to inform the Ministry of Education by written report of result of experimental verification of home schooling.

The way home schooling was controlled during experimental verification varied at individual schools considerably. The main reason can be seen in the fact that the original conditions under which home schooling was practiced provided great power to directors of the schools. School management have determined the specific form of organization in its sole discretion. It happened that home education at individual schools was largely influenced by the personality of the school principals and the school managements about the idea of how such a form of education should work and should be controlled. Management of individual schools organized and controlled home schooling often by very creative and original way.

## **2.3 Admission of pupils to home schooling during the experiment**

Enrollment of pupils into home schooling took place in several stages in most schools. The first step was a submission written request for the inclusion of the child in the experimental verification of home schooling or just completing the questionnaire by parents. After that, parents were invited to conduct an interview. The aim of the interview was to find out the reasons that led parents to home schooling and to ensure that parents are able to provide their child a suitable education. Schools investigated the educational attainment of parents, family functioning and its material and space equipment. Some schools wanted to be assured that the child would have sufficient possibility of contact with peers after joining the experiment. In some schools management required a doctor's opinion about the ability of the child to be educated at home, sometimes also the doctor's opinion about the ability of educators to educate the child at home. In individual cases, the school required the expression of educational and psychological counsellors. In rare cases, schools have exercised their right and refused some families to enroll in an experiment. If the family agreed that it fulfill all required conditions of home school education and schools positively evaluated prospects that the family will successfully home educate their children, both sides signed an agreement on the inclusion of the child in experimental verification of home schooling.

## **2.4 Methodological school activities and organization of home education**

As we mentioned above, each school had its own ideas about how homeschooling ideally should look like. For example, some schools approach was largely based on trust to parents. Their ideology was based on the philosophy that the primary responsibility for the education of the children is on their



parents. These schools primarily verify that the parents provided adequate training appropriate to their children individual needs and abilities. These schools offered support programs, but participation in these events have not obligatory.

Other schools felt like the experts responsible for supervision of teaching. They wanted to be convinced that the children would be provided by parents the most effective way of teaching. Thanks to that opinion, the school required the participation of parents in regular one-month consultations with school designated consultants. The task of the consultants was to identify progress and potential gaps in child education and propose changes if necessary. The purpose of all this activities was to avoid mistakes parents could do in the education of their children and provide them early diagnosis of any educational problems. Besides the mandatory one-month regular consultations the schools requested participation of children in classes (once or twice a week). Side effect of this effort was that all these activities were very time demanding for both educators and pupils.

### **2.5 Methods of evaluation of home schooling during verification**

Each school had its own ideas about how home education should be ideally evaluated. Evaluation of children varied substantially from one school to another. In some schools evaluation of home education was organized by individual interviews between at least one member of the evaluation team and pupil and his parents. During the interview, it was checked whether the child is educated appropriately to his age and his individual abilities. Great attention was paid to some school materials, which brought the child to the interview (the portfolio). This method of control was very positively evaluated by parents and children. Most home educated children were looking forward the opportunity to present the results of their work.

Other schools conducted assessment of pupils in groups, in some cases in several days. The first day was focused on mathematics and Czech language. On the second day additional knowledge and skills were assessed. Both oral and written form by tests were used. Because every child learned according to their own individual plan, it was necessary to develop for each child individualized special test. This way of evaluation was not very popular for many reasons.

### **3. Conclusion**

During the experimental verification of home schooling in the Czech Republic great power has been given to the directors of the participating schools. The practice of home schooling therefore very much differed from one school to another. But in the end the practice established during the experimental verification is still used. Although the Education Act legalized home education and established the basic regulation, under which children can be educated at home, a great power was given to headmasters of schools. Consequently, practice of home schooling in Czech Republic substantially differs according the internal rules of schools under whose supervision it is implemented. Currently nearly 2,000 students are educated at home in the Czech Republic. The schools are responsible for supervision of home schooling also in other Central European post-communist countries (Kostecká 2010, 2012, 2017).

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